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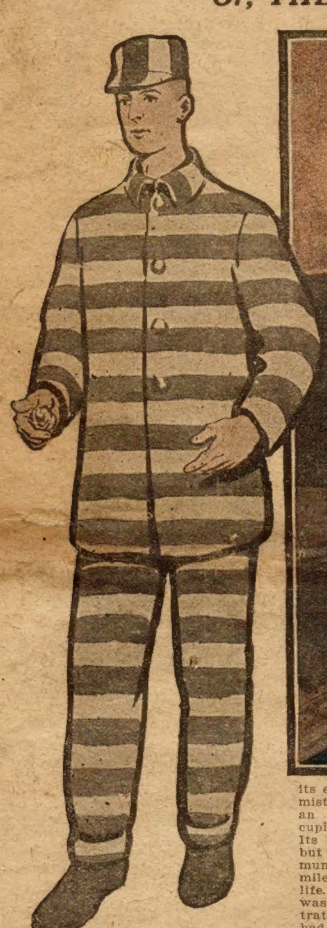
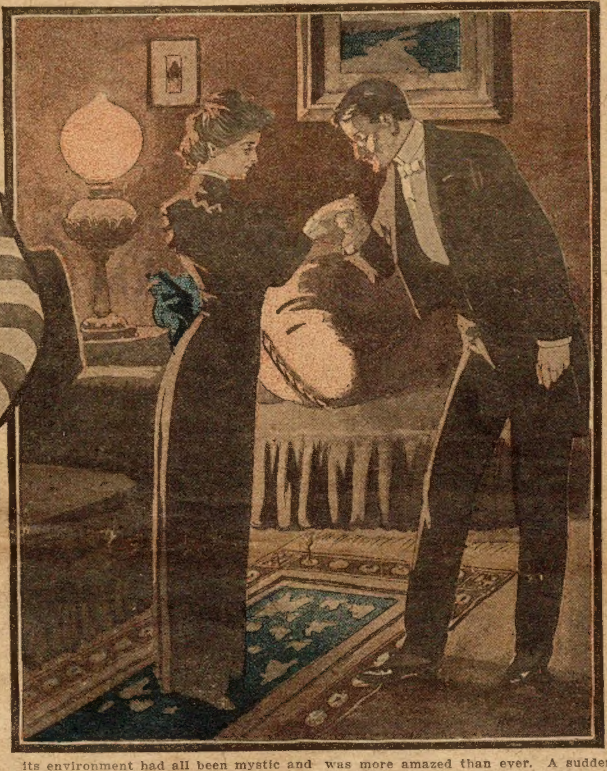
MADELINE DARE'S VENGEANCE;

Or, THE UNWRITTEN LAW. By Weldon J. Cobb





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CHAPTER I.

"HOW is the patient, doctor?" "She is fast going out with the tide." "There is no hope?" "None—she will not last the night through." "Going out with the tide—into the light! into the light!"

Dr. Prothero glanced strangely at his companion. He could not but notice the simply dressed, but exquisitely molded form of Madeline Rossiter. Then his eyes were fixed upon and studied the statuesque face of the girl whom he had seen many times during the past few weeks, but whom he could never understand.

Dr. Prothero understood Miss Rossiter less than ever as he regarded her now.

The dark, restless eyes were fixed as if she saw some distant vision. The features vibrated with some sentient emotion. Then, like a mask a firm, sad immobility shadowed the fine features, and she stood silent, erect, like some soul looking far into the future.

"A forceful woman." Dr. Prothero told himself—"a figure for a life tragedy. Who is she? Where did she come from? What is the secret of her position and power in this house?"

House and girl, and its young mistress, Miss Rivers, and its servants and its environment had all been mystic and misty to the physician. The place was an old mansion now only partly occupied. It had been vacant for years. Its new tenants had come quietly, had but the slightest possible business communication with the town of Bristol, a mile distant, and had lived a secluded life. Of all the villagers, Dr. Prothero was its only inhabitant who had penetrated into the gloomy place, and then had been professionally called to attend to a lonely, dying patient, whose life, as he had just said, was fast ebbing away, "going out with the tide."

For a moment or two the physician stood regarding Miss Rossiter with attention and interest. His usually keen precision in analyzing a symptom or a case was at fault when he came to apply its methods to this strange girl beside him. Slowly drawing on his gloves, he spoke again.

"This change will mean a great deal to you, Miss Rossiter?"

"You mean the death of Miss Rivers?" said the girl. "It will mean the loss of the dearest, the only friend I have in the world."

"I did not mean that entirely," replied Dr. Prothero. "Miss Rivers will probably tell you, what she has intimated to me, that your faithfulness has won from her a substantial recognition."

He paused. There had flashed into the face of Miss Rossiter a sudden fire that almost drove him back.

"You mean money?" she said, and her tone grew hard and harsh.

"I mean provision for your comfort, an assured future."

"Stop—how dare you?" breathed the girl, scorching him with a glance. "How dare you sully the love, the devotion, that have come into my poor, lonely life like jewels rare and pure and holy, by a reference to money? I do not want it—I would not take it. Oh, Dr. Prothero, save her! save her!"

A new phase in the strange nature of the strange young girl, and Dr. Prothero was more amazed than ever. A sudden transition of emotion from mute despair to indignation, from that in turn to an emotion of pleading, wildly expressed in swaying figure and clasped, wringing hands—the gamut of moods, thoughts, sentiments involved, made the experienced physician think of some great tragic actress of power and eloquence. And then as suddenly the strong face grew white and cold, and the girl stood immobile, statuesque once more. Dr. Prothero had expected hysteria, a collapse of the nervous system under severe physical and mental strain. He reached over, took up her hand, and, looking into her eyes, placed his finger upon her pulse.

"You must not overdo yourself," he began, and then added in wonder to himself: "Not a tremor, not a vibration! What self control! What a marvelous nurse this girl would make, a battlefield heroine."

For all the wonderful self control of the girl, the observant physician traced wistful appeal under the chained emotion. Were this woman the most consummate actress in the world, he could not resist the impulse to pity her. He could not reassure her, but it was in a tone softened with sympathy and respect that he told her:

"Medical science can do nothing more for Miss Rivers. She is like a fading flower, drooping, dying fast. She knows her condition and is submissive. I have left her a stimulant, but it would be better if she did not take it, for the reaction will shorten her moments. I will return at midnight. If she requires me before then telephone me promptly. Good-by."

He extended his hand as he spoke. Miss Rossiter stared. Then with a quick, questioning glance at him she caught the significance of the adieu, choked down a sob and bent her head.

Once alone in the room, Madeline Rossiter clenched her finger nails into her palms and strove to obtain perfect mastery over nerves and fair features.

Her face softened as she approached the door of the sickroom and gently opened it. Her eyes grew humid. She was a being transformed, glorified, as she glided toward a bed upon which lay a woman a few years her senior, but with a girlish, almost childlike, face, but woefully thin and white. Hands the color of marble rested upon the counterpane. The gentle soul so near to the dark shadows of death breathed so flutteringly that only the faintest movement of the lips was noticeable.

"Oh, my poor dear! my p dear!" murmured the nurse and frien kneeling at the bedside of the sufferer, and putting her arms about her as if to shield her from impending harm.

Elinor Rivers opened her eyes and smiled. She moved a wasted hand to touch that of her loyal nurse. She was so weak she could not clasp it.

"The medicine—in the large glass," she panted painfully.

"Not that," pleaded her nurse. "Let me give you the quieting drops, the other medicine."

"No; the large glass," insisted Miss Rivers, still weakly but with definiteness. "Do not worry, dear, I know of what you are thinking. Dr. Prothero has told me all about it."

"But it will—it may shorten—have a later effect."

"Never mind," with a smile. I have something I must do before I die, something I must say, and the medicine will give me the strength to perform my task. Give it to me, dear."

With a sigh Miss Rossiter consented. The effect of the stimulant was immediate and forceful. A faint flush came into the white face of the patient, her eyes grew brighter.

"Lift me up now," she said. "Prop the pillows behind me. Now bring me the small portfolio from my writing desk. Put out the light, dear, and come and sit down beside me, but first draw the curtains wide open. Place your hand in mine. Now then let me rest a moment, to rally the strength I need to tell you what I have to say."

It was a rare picture with a strange setting. The most brilliant moonlight flooded the fair vernal scene without and irradiated the apartment almost bright as day. It illumined the angelic features of the dying girl with the subtle sadness of dissolution. Upon the face of the other is limned the most intense emotions, the battleground of a soul repressed yet anguished, with all that heroism and sacrifice could imply.

"Listen, dear," said Elinor at last. "I have something to say to you that will make my heart the happier for its true sincerity, and yours the brighter, perhaps, when I am gone, because you will know how gladly and gratefully I have cherished all your kindness to me. You have been more than a friend—a loving, self-sacrificing sister to me. I have never asked what your life might have been before you came to me. I do not ask it now. I only know that you have been to me a comfort and an inspiration to love and duty."

"My life?" replied Madeline, her face quivering, "I never knew living till I met you. Let me tell you this much, I never knew the love of a mother. I saw the bright days of my girlhood drift by and stood in the cold world alone. It was toil, hardship, in a lonely existence with
people who cared nothing for me. The
I went out into the world. In art, mus
literature, in my brief stage life, the
thought nothing of me because I
poor and obscure. The women pl
only to use me so far as I would
them. I made no friends, I eva
men, I ignored women. Life w
less burden. The evening w
sponse to your advertisement
panion I came to you, I had
a plunge into the dark ri
my misery and loneliness.

"You must not talk
soothingly, gently stro
head of her companion

"Your was the first
heart I had ever kno
line. "The last six
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your friendship
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ingly!"

"I know it,
Elinor in a t
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"And now, oh, my dear friend, let me go with you, let me die, too!" At last the repressed soul lost control. In burning tears and choking sobs the loyal nurse told the fervor of her love and sorrow. Even her hand went over to the little medicine stand, as if to select some phial that would enable her to accompany her one true friend in the world into the dark and looming future.

"Be calm, my dear," consoled the dying girl. "You speak of your lonely, loveless life. Let me tell you of mine. I loved a man three years ago as few women ever loved—Wade Raycroft. It was only to find myself deserted for another. More than this, the man I so trusted involved my poor brother in a plot to rob the great corporation by whom both of them were employed. My recreant lover fled with the woman he loved and a stolen fortune for foreign parts. My brother unjustly bore the brunt of the crime. My poor brother, unstable as water, was easily led. He is a convict today under a sentence of thirty years' penal imprisonment."

"Oh!" panted Madeline, as if the horror of the declaration shocked and stunned her.

"My heart was nearly broken," continued Elinor, "but I thought of duty and had something to live for. For the past two years I have lived only for the sake of my misguided brother. I hoped to secure his pardon. Powerful influences blocked the way. I have planned and plotted to secure his liberty through other means. Death calls me with my task only half accomplished."

There was a mournful cadence to the tones of the dying girl. She closed her eyes, and the great shining tears coursed down her sunken cheeks.

"The portfolio," she directed after a poignant moment of silence, and she took it in her hand. "This contains all my earthly possessions—nearly five thousand dollars in money. I leave it to you, I give it to you unrestrictedly."

She extended it weakly to Madeline. The latter shrunk as if at the touch of a whiplash. She shuddered and allowed the portfolio to drop to the floor.

"No! no! no!" she cried in a wild excess of emotion. "Money? reward? It would poison all the future, it would shrivel up all the pure friendship and devotion I feel for you. I wish your love only. When you are gone, with no object in life, I shall soon follow you."

"No object in life?" repeated Elinor, and a new serious thoughtfulness came into her face. "My dear—look."

She disengaged from her throat a slender chain containing a locket.

"Take it," she said. "Open not that side; I have never looked at it since he—he went away with another. The other side—it is my brother."

The moonlight was so bright that Madeline could clearly view the small portrait before her.

"A winning face, like yours," she murmured. "And he is a convict—and you have tried to bring him his liberty?"

"When I am gone," replied Elinor, "I want you to read what I have written, contained in that portfolio. It will tell you all my plans, how near I was to success."

"I cannot endure it!"

The speaker had arisen to her feet, her whole frame quivering with excitement. Her breath came quickly, her eyes were glowing like diamonds.

"What is it, dear?" questioned Elinor, and her voice was quavering.

"There is money, you say. Your plans for the release of your brother are written out. Oh, for your dear sake I would give my life to benefit one dear to you. Let me take your place as his sister. Let me show my heart's devotion to you by carrying to fulfillment your interrupted plans."

"Oh, if you could—oh, if you only could!" breathed the dying girl.

"I can, I will!" cried Madeline, with ringing fervor and resolution, in her tones. "I solemnly promise it—I swear it!"

"My love! my love!" fluttered the dying girl faintly, but with a seraphic smile of joy on her poor, thin face, "you have made me, even in death, happy to die!"

When Dr. Prothero came to the lonely old mansion at midnight, Miss Rossiter met him at the door with the sad intelligence that an hour before Elinor Rivers had drifted out with the tide.

CHAPTER II.

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nb for the past three years
nearly ten times that period
nt yet to serve before he
ally acquitted of his debt

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ped hair there was no
risoner that he was
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his face of a pleas-
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As he restlessly
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lashed quickly,
vigilance and

ds floating on the noisy air of the outside corridors that certain token for which he so anxiously waited was not present, and then——

"Two—four—six—eight," the uneasy tramp, resembling that of some caged animal, was resumed.

Finally the prisoner sat down on the edge of his iron bunk. For a few moments his eyes were fixed dreamily on space. Then he reached inside his convict shirt and drew thence a small folded paper.

It was soiled as if it had been read and reread times out of number. It had been folded and refolded so often that it seemed that the lightest touch would cause it to fall into fragmentary sections. Very carefully the prisoner opened the little piece of writing, spread it out beside him on the rough blanket of his bunk, and scanned it by the light that came in through the grated cell door.

"Clear, simple, definite," he said in a low, thoughtful tone. "The directions are specific. The first words could be written only by a friend: 'Another has taken up the unfinished work of your sister. She died loving you, thinking only of your release. She has entrusted the completion of her plans to the one in whose arms she died.'"

Rapidly the eyes of the convict scanned the lines before him. It was a strange type of writing, the chirography was feminine. It comprised a series of notations and dates. To one conversant with the tenor of its significance it was a group of careful directions, the guide to a progressive journey.

"There can be no mistaking what I am to do," ruminated convict 9,799. "Its start begins with the appearance of Trusty 5. It ends with finding the original of the little portrait, which the lawyer who visited me here in prison a month ago slipped to me with those written directions."

The speaker drew out a small miniature. It framed a dark, impressive face. It was that of Madeline Rossiter.

The eyes of the convict rested upon the portrait in interest and admiration. Away from all womankind, this reminder of the outside world seemed to be a cherished souvenir. Suddenly he thrust document and portrait out of view. His frame sprang into intense rigidity. Two men had halted in the corridor directly without the door of his cell. One was the turnkey of the tier. He, as well as his companion, the convict recognized by his voice.

"Trusty 5!" he gasped, trembling all over with suspense and excitement—"the hour has come!"

"Want a man, do you?" spoke the turnkey.

"Yes, right away."

"Extra work?"

"Dangerous—too. I don't suppose there's many would care to take the job. See here, though, the tall young fellow, a thirty-year termer—he helped me a week ago. Good worker."

"Oh, you mean 9,799?"

"Do I? All right, show him up."

The turnkey tapped his great bunch of keys on the door of the cell till they jangled.

"Yes, that's the one," said Trusty 5, with a glance and a nod at the prisoner. "Want to do night work, win a good credit mark and have a day's loafing in you cell tomorrow?"

"I'm your man," responded 9,799 promptly.

"Let him out," directed Trusty 5. "Follow me," he added, as the door of the cell was opened by the turnkey, and 9,799 stepped out.

The convict held his breath for anxiety and hopefulness. He recognized this visit as the first step in a great life drama, perhaps a tragedy. He was courageous to meet either risk. He followed his guide in as natural and off-handed a manner as he could assume.

When they reached the lower corridor and faced the guard at the great door letting out into the prison yard, the latter made a notation in a book. Then he handed two large white badges to the trusty. The latter pinned one to his own breast, the other on that of 9,799, who understood that the badges gave them the freedom of the yard in case they met any of the other guards.

The trusty passed several buildings. He led the way towards a small grim structure at a remote corner of the great enclosure. It was surrounded by railroad tracks. Upon one of these was a locomotive attached to several flat cars loaded with iron tanks about four feet high and having levers.

The trusty edged close to 9,799. His tone was low and confidential as he said mysteriously,

"I have only six months more to serve, and a wife and family outside of the prison."

"Yes?" murmured the convict interrogatively, awaiting further enlightenment.

"It would break my heart to lose my good time allowance. For the sake of one thousand dollars for my family I am risking it for you."

"What do you want me to say?"

"That, no matter what the outcome of this experiment to land you beyond these prison walls, you will not implicate me."

"I swear it!"

"Yonder is the dynamite house," continued the trusty. "It contains the giant powder used in blasting in the prison quarries."

"Yes, I know."

"You are supposed by the prison authorities to be detailed to assist me in moving some boxes inside the magazine."

"I understand."

"As we pass the last car yonder, out of the sight of any of the guards, spring upon it, remove a cover of one of the tanks, and get in, pulling the cover back over you. The tanks are about filled with ashes from the shops. In a few minutes the train will move out through the gates. They will come to a halt near the dump pits. There you must take care of yourself."

"Trust me, I will not fail."

"You know where to go?"

"I have it all by heart," responded 9,799, touching his blouse where the worn fragment of paper reposed.

"Good."

"But you?"

"I have arranged it all. I am supposed to have gone into the powder house with you. In reality I will go in alone. Shortly I will rush out with a yell. Accidentally a lantern was overturned—understand?"

"I think I do."

"The place is in a blaze. The dynamite blows the building to atoms—you to fragments, along with it."

"Then, when I leave the prison behind me, I shall not only be free but to all intents and purposes dead?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

"I am paid. Go."

As the trusty unlocked a door in the powder house and disappeared within the structure, convict 9,799 sprang to the freight car. In a flash he was in the tank and under cover. He was no longer anxious or timorous. Instead, a mighty welling triumph sang through his senses.

"All has been arranged for me, I cannot fail," he breathed confidently, and thought with gratitude of the original of the face in the miniature.

The train of cars began to move in about five minutes. The cover upon the tank in which he had concealed himself was slightly tilted, and past a mere thread of an orifice 9,799 could look out.

The train neared the gates, which were opened. Glancing back, the convict heard a loud yell. He saw the trusty rushing from the powder house, shouting out in accents of terror and alarm, and waving his arms frantically.

Inside the magazine was a lurid light. Then, just as the train cleared the enclosure gate, a frightful explosion rang out.

"Free!" almost screamed the convict, in an access of wild emotion. "Better than free—dead! Yes, dead to the world, and dead to the law!"

CHAPTER III.

Convict 9,799 had told Trusty 5 that he had his instructions by heart. True or not, his actions during the hour succeeding to the explosion were automatic and timed to the turn of a second.

When the freight train came to a stop, it was at the edge of a pit where the ashes and workshop refuse of the prison were dumped. Pushing aside the cover of the tank which had concealed him so effectually, the convict dropped to the ground, crawled to the edge of the pit, and slid and rolled down the incline to the bottom.

The night was dark. No one in charge of the train had seen him. He was fully a mile distant from the prison now. The pit sloped to a shallow water course, and within five minutes time the refugee was as far from the railroad as he had been from the prison.

No. 9,799 took deep thirsty draughts of the first free air he had tasted for long years. That had been a cruel, bitter period to his restless spirit. He felt that he could walk on and on interminably. Even the dim stars were a novelty to him. The fragrance of the grasses and bushes was like some unaccustomed subtile perfume.

"So far there has not been the minutest break in the program," he told himself. "The instructions direct me to go due west and past a traversed country turnpike. That must be it to my right. 'A small lake beyond.' I catch a gleam of its waters directly ahead. Yes, there can be no mistake. 'A large straw stack'—I see it. 'Search at its right end.' Here we are."

Each sentence denoted a forward progress in consonance with the notations on the well-remembered sheet of paper in his pocket. As he arrived at the straw stack, 9,799 began to explore its end. He groped in among the straw to some purpose, for he soon drew out a package.

Opening this, he revealed a soiled, ragged garb of a laborer. He put this on over the striped convict suit. There was a tin dinner pail with the outfit, and a shovel. Shouldering the implement, he started on his way back to the highway.

"It has worked to a charm so far," he uttered in a tone of exaltation.

Before he had been hopeful, now he was defiant. If Trusty 5 had done his work well back at the prison, his fate in the powder house explosion would be readily accepted by the prison authorities, and there would be no search for him. He felt absolutely secure in his new disguise. To all appearances he was a belated laborer or night traveler, seeking work, or on his way to an appointment for the same.

"A five mile tramp," he ruminated, swinging cheerily along the dark country road. "Whoever laid out this route for me has planned to perfection. I am to reach a place called Ridgeton, where there is a coal mine. There I will find an employment agent, who distributes workmen over the State. I am to present myself as one seeking employment. I will find many others there. I shall be lost, as to curiosity of identity, among the throng. I am to remain there all day tomorrow. At nightfall, before myself and others are shipped to another part of the State, I am to slip away from the place. I am to reach a designated cross roads. By and by an automobile will appear. Its driver will ask me the time of night. I am to say 'ten.' He is to say 'jump in.' Then what next? Oh, this is like some cut and dried romance out of a story book—and a beautiful woman at the end of it."

Confident, exhilarated, 9,799 continued on his way. After a time he overtook a man plodding along in the same direction. He passed him to come up with others. Ahead of them was quite a group of men. All wore the garb of laborers. Some had shovels, some pickaxes, all had dinner pails, and some of them a bundle apparently containing extra overalls and jumpers.

"Going to the mine?" inquired one of the men.

"Why, yes," answered 9,799. "Any chance for a job?"

"A poor one, yes. They have advertised for hands."

When they reached an enclosure just beyond a small town, they were allowed to enter unquestioned. Here a mine was in operation by the persons owning the present recruiting camp.

There was a long shed with board tables, and lighted up. Here the men were free to order a coarse meal and sleep on the floor until morning. No. 9,799 submitted to circumstances. The place was not very remote from the prison wence he had escaped, but he felt that it was imperative that he implicitly follow out the directions contained in the treasured document within the blouse.

He herded in with the men companionably, ate a good meal, and went to sleep soundly on the floor, despite his excitement and feverish anticipations as to what the morrow would bring.

After breakfast in the morning an employment agent passed among the men. They were separated into various groups. That to which 9,799 found himself apportioned was to leave for a Southern mine late that evening.

The convict wandered about the enclosure, interesting himself in passing incidents as they came under his notice. About noon he chanced to pick up a daily newspaper in the office of the mine.

It was with strangely unusual emotions that he read the accounts of the explosion of the powder magazine. Trusty 5 had escaped in safety, but the building had been blown to atoms—its sole occupant, convict 9,799, to shreds.

"Was ever plan so favorable and fortunate?" he mused. "There will be no search for me. I am free as the air, the birds!"

He went to a grassy spot under a tree at a remote part of the camp and sat down there. With a splinter of wood he whimsically dug a hole, covered it up, set up the splinter as a tombstone, and smiled gaily.

"So I bury convict 9,799 out of sight, fathoms deep, never to be resurrected," he breathed joyfully. "A new life! For good or bad, the world is all before me."

After supper 9,799 stole away from the spot that had afforded him a secure temporary shelter. Within an hour he reached the cross roads described in the directions, and concerning which he had thought all day. He sat down on a fallen tree trunk. About an hour later an automobile driven by one man came to the spot.

"What is the time?" called out the muffled up chauffeur.

"Ten."

"Jump in."

In a swirl of luxurious enjoyment 9,799 was whirled away. His pulses sang with rare delight. Then a swift progress was made for fully twenty miles. As they neared the light of some town the chauffeur halted the machine and touched his cap politely, with the words:

"My orders stop here, sir."

"Thanks," spoke 9,799, and stepped out of the automobile, which turned and quickly disappeared in the direction from which it had come.

The convict took in his bearings. He had memorized the directing document so clearly that every step of progress seemed marked out for him.

Just as the village clock was tolling the hour of nine, he arrived at the rear door of the old mansion where his sister, Elinor Rivers, had died months previous.

The place was closely shuttered. There was light within, but the shades were tightly drawn.

"Arrived at last," breathed the excited refugee. "I was to knock at the rear door."

Tap—tap—tap!

"Come in," pronounced the silvery, tremulous tones of a woman.

CHAPTER IV.

Convict 9,799 opened the door and stepped within a brilliantly lighted apartment as if across the threshold of fate.

For a moment he was dazzled. It was dark and chill without.

The turn of a door knob had ushered him into the midst of warmth, light, comfort, elegance. Almost involuntarily he raised oné hand to shield his eyes, fixed in wonder upon the woman who had bidden him enter.

This was the final moment, the crisis in the experiences and hopes of the past months. For this immemorial hour he had watched, waited, dreamed. The girl confronting him, greeting him with parted lips and eager, analytical gaze, was the original of the little miniature in the breast pocket of his convict jacket.

Madeline Rossiter was dressed in black. She did not wear one relieving shade of color contrast except for a delicate lace collar at the throat, yet there was something in face, form and grace of bearing that was almost queenly. The convict gazed blankly, speechless. A man herded in for weary heart-breaking years with rough, coarse criminals, this charming presentment of rare beauty and perfect grace fascinated, enthralled him, holding him speechless and motionless.

The room was neatly, almost luxuriously furnished. To the dazzled sight of the visitor his hostess seemed to sway toward him through perfumed air. He was conscious that a soft, yielding hand momentarily rested within his own, that a gentle, winning voice spoke the words:

"You are welcome, Mr. Rivers—come."

Irresistibly she led him across the room, opened a door, and, stepping across a threshold, 9,799 found himself in another apartment. As the door closed after him, Madeline Rossiter almost swayed to a seat, and placed her hand across her breast as if to quell the wildly throbbing palpitations of her heart. If the man had waited for this strange moment through long weary weeks, so had she. She had sacrificed time, money, anxiety to bring about this remarkable escape. It was to welcome a grimed, uncouth convict, but——

"For the sake of his dead sister," breathed the girl ardently. "Elinor, I have kept my promise."

No. 9,799 stood in a new lighted room. He was shocked, stunned. It seemed impossible to realize his true situation. The zest of uncertainty and adventure in his experience up to this moment had kept his thoughts busy, but now the final haven of security and rest was attained. In his wildest dreams he had never fancied such a reception as this. It was like a translation to fairyland.

The impression was intensified as he glanced about the room. Its furnishings embodied all that comfort and luxury could suggest. There was a bath with every accessory of eleganee and convenience present. On a dressing table lay a razor case and other adjuncts for the most perfect toilette, upon a couch were suits of clothes. One was an evening dress suit. There were shoes, slippers, gloves, handkerchiefs, silk hose, underwear—in fact, a perfect double outfit, embracing the most expensive materials.

A card case lay open on a bureau. The bits of pasteboard bore a name: "Mr. Cyril Dare." With the initials "C. D." all the toilet articles and the clothing were marked. There was a wig, a false mustache, a pair of gold rimmed glasses. As if a mere metamorphosis from rags to broadcloth were not sufficient, here, too, was provided a disguise.

"Everything here for a new identity," murmured the stupefied refugee. "What a woman, to think of it all. She has even given me a new name."

He sat down and repeated it over and over—"Cyril Dare, Cyril Dare." His memory reproduced the fair enchantress who had wrought all the possibilities of this marvelous change.

"A friend of my sister," breathed the refugee. "A friend, indeed!"

In the outer room Madeline sat like one in a trance. Her eyes were luminous. An awakened soul showed in her face. She was stirred to the depths of her heart, to realize that she had taken up the unfinished work of poor, faithful Elinor Rivers, and had carried it to successful completion.

And now—she wondered what would come of it all. Gratitude? Well, that would be sweet to her famished soul. Her heart throbbed fast as she wondered if her true fidelity might awaken in the man she had made dead to the world, and yet revived as a new personality, a deeper sentiment in his heart.

He was a convict, a fugitive from justice. Well, what was she, friendless, homeless, without a close acquaintance in the world? "Unstable as water," the dead sister had described him—more sinned against than sinning. Then he needed a guide, a counselor, a loyal life companion. What a tender solution to the strange situation, if she could find a true life mate in this man with a broken life, and lead him to become something greater, something better!

Then a bitter wave crossed the face of the girl. No, not for her was love—it had never been her lot to win it. Even in the first vague glance at the face of the old Barton Rivers, the new Cyril Dare, she had traced a wavering will, capricious impulse. In his long confinement he must have dreamed wild dreams of liberty—the great city, the gay crowds, a life of variety and excitement.

"I will go on to the end," said Madeline, with a deep sigh. "I will neither seek to interest his gratitude nor his friendship."

It was her turn to become startled as the new man entered the room. For a moment she stood staring at him. Dead, indeed, was the old Barton Rivers. Not a man in a thousand would have connected this elegant gentleman with the squalid fugitive who had entered this house an hour before.

Blood and breeding told in the courteous mien, the finely chiseled features, the almost princely bearing of Cyril Dare. As if the past were irretrievably buried, as if he had come on an equal footing for the first time into the presence of an old time acquaintance, so he advanced to the side of the bewildered Madeline.

"I am Cyril Dare," he said, in a strong, musical voice.

"And I am Madeline Rossiter," replied his hostess, speaking steadily, with an effort. "I was deputized to make certain preparations for your reception. They will be accomplished when I have explained a little further to you at dinner."

She touched a bell. Madeline had secured a woman from the village to assist her. Soon another bell in another room sounded. She made a gesture to Dare. He followed her into a room ablaze with light. It was a diningroom, its table set with a sumptuous meal. No servants were in sight.

Cyril Dare handed his hostess to a chair with rare courtesy. Prison discipline had not robbed him of his former training. He was the gentleman complete, in action as in words, all through the meal.

It was rare luxury to partake of the rich viands after the years of coarse fare. To the eyes of Madeline, as his satisfaction grew, he seemed to emerge further and further from the taint of the prison rot and the furtive repression of the prison captive.

He offered her his arm as the meal was finished. She accepted it gracefully and directed their steps to still another room. It was that in which Elinor Rivers had died. Dare took a luxurious arm chair. Madeline sat down at the side of a small stand.

"It was in this room that your sister died," she was the first to speak. "Dear, loyal Elinor! With her dying breath she entrusted to me the mission which has brought you here tonight."

Cyril Dare arose. He came over to where his hostess sat. He took one of her hands, and bent over it with the courtly grace of some gallant knight errant of the days of chivalry, and kissed it.

"Brave lady," he said, his voice tremulous with emotion, "brave, dear lady, I can speak no words that can tell you what I feel of gratitude, deep and fervent, in my heart of hearts."

CHAPTER V.

In a warm outburst of heroic and gratified emotion Cyril Dare had expressed his sentiments in a way likely to attract the regard of any impressionable woman.

He was entirely sincere at the moment. One knowing him better, however, than she to whom he spoke, would have allowed for the unusual circumstances of the case.

Madeline met his ardent gaze and trembled. The touch of his warm willing lips upon her hand thrilled her as she had never been moved before. She had steeled herself to perform her duty in behalf of dead Elinor Rivers, simply and definitely. Now she felt that she stood on the brink of a situation she could not entirely analyze.

All the cold reserve of her nature melted under the sun of approbation. For an instant her nature, thoughts and ambitions seemed to fuse with those of the man before her. A wild, tumultuous dream swept through her soul.

What more in keeping with the loving desire of loyal-hearted Elinor than that she, Madeline, should come into the life of her refugee brother as a guide, a helper. If his impulses were weak and his energies misdirected, by patience and love a miracle might be accomplished. In his new guise Cyril Dare was a presentable, even a handsome man. His bringing up had been good and his tastes naturally refined.

To the end of the chapter, however, in a sense he was an outcast. He could never hope or dare to again appear as Barton Rivers. No matter what success he might acquire in life, back in the shadows of his soul must lurk the memory of his transgressions.

Could his impulsive nature, alone, combat all this? She now held the secret of his life. What more meet than that these, she, the homeless girl, he, the social outcast, should go forth together, hand in hand, strong in their unity to fight the battle of life?

Instantly, however, Madeline checked these wild thoughts, as unusual to her repressed nature. As Dare resumed his seat, she calmed down the vivid emotions that had stirred her soul so powerfully. She again faced her guest, her visitor, seriously and with composure of manner.

"There is something I must tell you," she said, and recited to him briefly the story of her life and the dying trust of his sister. The man listened with bowed head. Madeline went on to tell of how carefully, patiently, secretly she had planned to make his escape from prison possible.

When Cyril Dare at last looked up, there were tears in his eyes. Madeline accepted it as a fair token of his better self, and was moved inexpressibly.

"As to the future," she continued, "I can only advise what Elinor suggested. You are free. The future is yours, to make or to mar. I am to hand you over the residue of that which I accepted in trust from your sister. In this pocketbook you will find the money. It amounts to nearly three thousand five hundred dollars. You will also find a detailed account of what I have expended in securing your release. This house and its contents your sister leased. The amount is paid up to the first of next month, the servants from the village are also paid up. You can remain here for the remaining weeks of the month, or go tonight, as you choose."

Cyril Dare took the pocketbook tendered. Vaguely, dreamily he glanced at the enclosure.

"What a splendid woman!" he burst forth with sudden enthusiasm. "How can I ever repay such sacrifice, such devotion? As to the money—no. It is yours. I would shame to take it."

"Be assured," interrupted Madeline, gently forcing back his extended hand, I have arranged for my own future."

Cyril Dare sank back in his chair. He sat like one in a daze. Luxury, security, money were his. His material wants were well supplied. The generous meal, the comfortable attire, the warmth, the light, the comfort overcame him with ideal enjoyment and satisfaction supreme.

Then his eyes rested upon the strange girl before him. A light of admiration came into his glance. The well molded figure, the fair, statuesque face appealed to him strongly. He suddenly arose to his feet.

"Miss Rossiter," he said, clearly, boldly, "you have given me liberty, safety, comfort, money. It is so great a boon that I can scarcely realize it, but I want something else."

He seized her hands suddenly and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Yes?" she murmured, trembling all over and swaying where she stood.

"I want—you!"

She wavered, dazzled. A great wave of emotion made her senses swim. She, the solitary, the unloved, had found shelter at last, and unresistingly she sank into his arms.

"I will come to you," she faltered, "when and where you like."

"Now," cried Cyril Dare, with sparkling eyes, "here and now!"

He imprinted a rapt kiss on her trembling lips, and went from the room to reappear instantly, his hat in his hand.

"Noble girl, loyal friend!" he cried, his face eager, earnest, happy. "I go only to find a clergyman, and you shall be mine."

Madeline heard his footsteps die out, the door close. He was gone. She almost fell to a seat, overcome. Oh! after all these lonely years, she was to find at last a loving heart, rest, peace, happiness for her famished soul!

She was to be a wife. But to be the wife of an ex-convict, a man morally weak? What would be the end of such a love and such a union?

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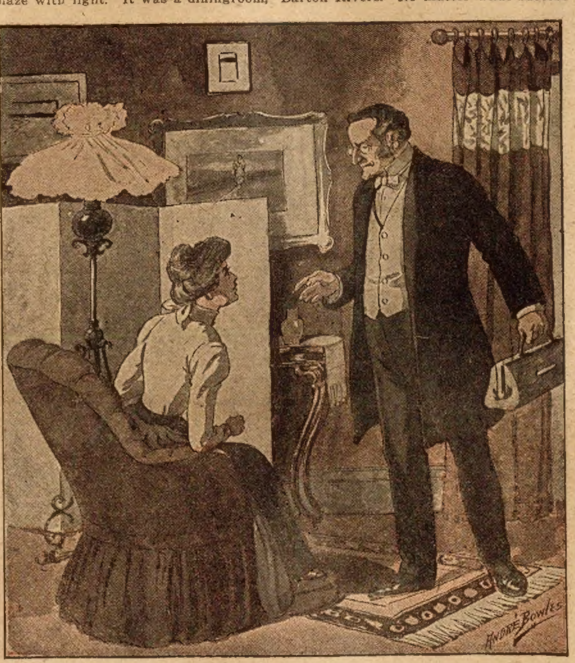

"Stop—how dare you?"

* * *

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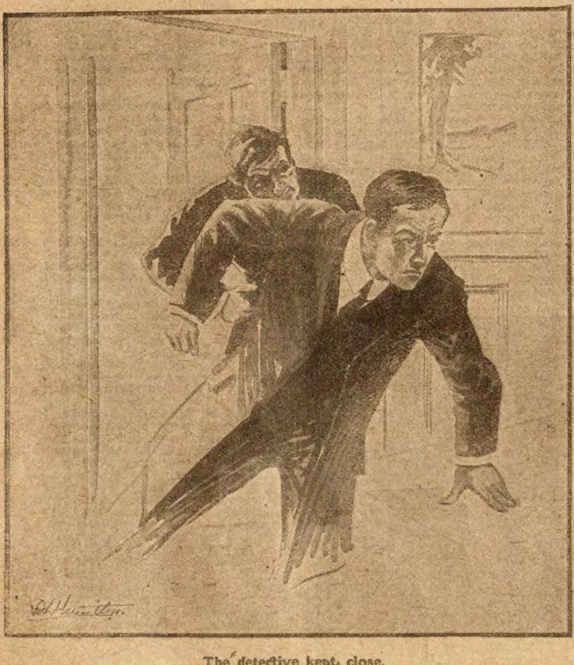

The detective kept close.

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CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Howard Willis realized that his wife had mysteriously vanished, nothing could restrain him from joining in the general search.

Despite his weakness, which was increased by his harrowing anxiety, the detective, who kept close to his side, was enabled by adroit questioning to get at the facts of the mysterious night, so far, at least, as Howard was aware of them.

He learned these facts from the perturbed man by snatches, now in the house, now in the yard, now upon the street, as Howard went hither and thither in the vain hope of discovering some clew leading to his wife's hiding place.

Keeneyes learned that while he was waiting in the dining room in complete darkness, holding the end of the ladder in mechanical fashion, but preparing to lay it upon the floor, even at that moment, some person must have been preparing to enter the bedroom exactly over his head.

In the meantime, Howard and his wife had gone to rest in that bedroom, having securely locked the door and bolted the windows, and feeling safe from the iron trunk because they knew Keeneyes would pass the rest of the night in the room directly under them. Nevertheless, they had not failed to look into the iron trunk before getting into bed, nor had they omitted examining every possible place of concealment in the bedchamber, which of course included the bed itself. In a word, they knew that they were alone in the room, and that every avenue of approach was defended.

And yet, by some means, a person had entered that room, and had entered it though a lamp was burning, only half turned down, upon the table, and had entered it while both Howard and his wife were asleep.

Howard could, of course, not speak for his wife; he could only tell of his own experiences. He said that when he was awakened, he knew not how or why, he started up with an uneasy impression that all was not right in the apartment. The feeling was vague but alarming—just such a vague presentiment that seemed always to visit him whenever something uncanny and inexplicable happened in connection with the iron trunk.

He looked, therefore, first of all at the iron trunk.

Or rather, he looked at the spot where he had seen the iron trunk before closing his eyes in slumber.

The trunk was gone. There was not a doubt of it. It had vanished!

This was not all that caught his attention.

One of the windows stood wide open.

His wife lay at his side, fast asleep.

Howard had grasped her wrist to awaken her. He admitted that a feeling of such shuddering dread took possession of him that he was unable to utter a single sound. Had he been able to shout, the detective might have arrived in time to be of service.

Mrs. Willis, thus roughly awakened, started up wildly, but, seeing the vacant space where the iron trunk had always stood, was stricken dumb. Howard, still unable to utter a word, had pointed at the open window. Then he perceived that Mrs. Willis had fallen back in a dead faint.

After this momentary paralysis of fear, Howard had leaped from the bed, but in his hurry his foot had become entangled in the bedclothing and he was thus cast headlong upon the floor.

As he fell, he had observed a movement from a distant corner.

Then a presence—a being—doubtless a man, had passed swiftly into the light of the lamp.

This intruder had struck Howard with fresh fear, not because of any apprehensions of physical injury, but because of an impression of the supernatural. The strange visitor did not appear human. If he was a man, as of course he must have been, for of course reason declared he could not be otherwise, he was unlike any man Howard had ever beheld.

It was at this point that the detective questioned most minutely.

"In what did his strangeness consist?"

Howard hesitated. He seemed to shrink from a description of the midnight intruder. Doubtless the recollection of the mysterious visitant gave fresh poignancy to the disappearance of his wife. At last he composed himself sufficiently to answer the detective.

Howard said that the first effect produced upon him by the being who had so strangely found access to his room was one of color.

"Yellow?" asked Keeneyes.

"Oh, yes, decidedly. Yellow—all yellow."

"But yellow, in what—yellow, how? Give me particulars."

"Just a general appearance—a—a total yellow."

"Now, for instance," said Keeneyes, "do you mean to say that his clothes were yellow?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The whole impression was yellow.'

"Then his coat was yellow? And his vest? And his trousers?"

"I do not know all this," Howard answered, despairingly. "I paid no attention to his clothes. I cannot remember if he had on a coat, or vest, or what he wore. I only know that whatever he had on the impression produced upon me was that of yellow."

"You mean to say, then, that his face and neck and hands were yellow?"

"That was the impression produced upon me. Of course," added Howard, "you'll remember I had stumbled and fallen violently upon the floor. I was hurt, and very much dazed. I was frightened and bewildered. I didn't see anything with exactitude, possibly. The trunk had disappeared; and here was a curious apparition in the room, though door and windows were still locked—that is to say, all except one window; and it was as strange for it to be open as for the trunk to be gone."

"You persist in saying that the trunk was gone," Keeneyes complained.

"I say so because it was gone."

"But when I came in, there stood the trunk," returned Keeneyes.

"I know nothing of that; but I know that, for a time, it vanished."

"How do you explain it?" Keeneyes asked, rather skeptically.

"Good heavens! I can explain nothing of what happened this night."

"To return to the man whom you call a 'being,'" said Keeneyes. "You say his face and neck and hands were yellow?"

"I know nothing of his neck or hands. But I do say his face was yellow."

"I presume you mean yellow in a different sense from the ordinary bilious complexion of a living person?"

"Yes, very different."

"It was not the parched, yellowish skin of old age, or sickness, or exposure?"

"No, no, it was unnaturally yellow—hideously yellow."

"Did it seem to have been painted by yellow paint?"

"No. At least I never thought of that while looking at it. It simply looked supernaturally yellow, as if it was yellow by nature, but not by human nature."

"This is a confusing statement," remarked the detective.

"I am confused," Howard admitted. He accosted several of his friends to ask if any trace of his wife had been found. The answer was in the negative, and he groaned and wrung his hands.

"Do you think—" began Keeneyes.

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Zellers," cried the frantic husband, "go and try to find my wife, and don't ask me any more questions! Find my wife, I say; find her!"

"Oh, your wife!" returned Keeneyes. "I am not uneasy about her."

"Not uneasy?"

"Certainly not."

"Then where is she?"

"As to that I am entirely ignorant."

"You don't know where she is, yet you are not uneasy?"

"My dear Mr. Willis, one thing at a time. If you can help me find this yellow being, I will find your wife."

"But, merciful father! Merciful powers! I help you find the creature? How can I, when I know absolutely nothing about his whereabouts?"

"Now, now," said Keeneyes, soothingly, "don't be excited; you have been helping me famously, and you are helping me right along."

"I have been helping you? But I have told you nothing. For I know nothing to tell."

"Yes, yes, you know a great deal. I must elicit it by questioning; so please be patient with me and answer—now you say his neck—"

"I didn't see his neck."

"Then he wore a high collar, did he?"

"I don't know what he wore."

"Ah," cried Keeneyes, triumphantly, "you see you are of great help to me. You don't know what he wore, and nothing could be better for my information than that. Good! Excellent! You don't think he had painted his face with yellow fence paint, or house paint?"

"It didn't impress me in that way. Maybe it had been. I know nothing about it."

"So much the better. But isn't it a fact that his face might have been yellow from having been rubbed with yellow clay?"

"It might have been. Anything might have been."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Another point—this man whom you call 'a 'being' must have disappeared through the window, since I came in at the door. Have you a second ladder on the place, by which he might have reached that window, to enter it?"

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"There is no second ladder on this place."

"That in itself is a valuable clew," Keeneyes declared. He seemed delighted with the progress he was making. Howard groaned in despair. The other's cheerfulness was almost more than he could bear.

"Now please continue your narrative, Mr. Willis," said Keeneyes.

"My narrative? I have no narrative to continue."

"Oh, excuse me, yes, you have. Why, my dear sir! You had only got so far as to where you tangled your foot up in the bedclothes—a most unfortunate time to meet with such a misadventure, my dear sir, when by all means you should have preserved your equilibrium—oh, if I could have been in your place!"

"Yes, I wish you could have been!" cried Howard.

"Thank you. And then, you say, you fell heavily upon the floor, and lay there. That is as far as you had gotten in your story."

"You heard me say that, as I lay there, I saw that being move toward the table from some obscure corner," returned Howard, as he and the detective passed briskly along an alley in their search.

"Yes, yes," Keeneyes agreed, keeping at his side with no little difficulty, for the young husband was almost frantic from his loss. "Go on."

"I told you that this 'being' was—was all yellow, at least that was the horrible impression he produced upon me."

"You told me that, but what happened?"

"I hardly know. All was confusion. My wife was shrieking in terror, no doubt at sight of the man. She had fainted, but I don't think her swoon lasted long. I was trying to disentangle my foot from the bedclothes, for I had dragged the quilt to the floor with me."

"Good heavens!" murmured Keeneyes. "But go on."

"The yellow monster dashed the lamp from the table. It was extinguished. All was dark. I struggled upon my feet and grappled with him. We struggled horribly. I could feel his hot breath upon me. It sickened me."

"Yes, I understand that," said Keeneyes.

"You understand why his breath was so nauseous—reminding me of death and decay?"

"Certainly. You thought of charnel houses, very likely. You thought him an ogre, a ghoul."

"I don't think I reflected at all, but that was certainly the impression he produced. At any rate, he swore like a man. And he struck me so murderously that I lost all consciousness. I don't know what happened after that."

"So you know nothing of what happened to your wife?"

"Nothing whatever. My mind is a blank until I opened my eyes and saw you and the doctor bending over me."

"Excuse me for pressing you," said Keeneyes, "but it will aid me if you will mention what you consider the strangest events, or conditions, of this admirable mystery."

"It is all equally incomprehensible."

"But for instance?"

"What has become of my wife?—that is all that interests me."

"Yes, yes, but tell me what you find strange, not what you find most interesting."

"It is strange how my wife vanished from the room, since you assure me she could not have gone out of the door."

"Well, how did she get out? That is very strange."

"Yes, it is, I admit. What else?"

"How did the creature get into the room, since you say you were directly under the floor in the room below, so he could not have come up through the iron trunk?"

"As you say, very strange! Pray continue."

"How did the iron trunk disappear, then come back to its ordinary place?"

"Yes, that is odd. If not an optical delusion—"

"Impossible. I stared at the place fixedly; the trunk was gone. Then when you restored me to consciousness there it was."

"Well, well, let it be there. What next?"

"It amazes me," cried Howard, "that you should lose time questioning me when you might be doing something. That, also, is a mystery."

"Pooh! There is nothing to be done."

"Then you give up my wife for lost?"

"On the contrary, I know her to be safe, perfectly safe."

"Safe?"

"Certainly."

"You know this?"

"I know it. So spare yourself all uneasiness."

"But how can you know it when you are ignorant of her whereabouts, or of how she vanished from the bedroom? How can you know it when she was carried away by that yellow monster clad only in her night robes?"

"Clad in fiddlesticks!" retorted the detective. "Your wife is wearing her blue heavy cloth suit at this moment—that blue dress that is rather unbecoming to her, because her complexion is so dark."

Howard grasped the other by the arm. "How do you know this?"

"Because the blue dress is gone. Amonia asked me where it was. The maid would know, if it were in its usual place."

"Then where is my wife, Mr. Zellers?"

"I wish I could tell you that," Keeneyes admitted. "I do not know. But of this I feel sure—that she is uninjured. And now that you have told me all you can tell, I will leave you and pursue my investigations alone."

CHAPTER XXIII

When Keeneyes left Howard Willis, the young husband continued to search Lumberburg in the faint hope of finding some trace to his missing wife. It cheered him a little to find his neighbors industriously bent upon the same exploration; and it was, to be sure, a relief to have escaped the persistent questionings of the detective—questionings which Howard told himself could evolve no information, since his own mind was in a state of tortured, mystified chaos.

Keeneyes, however, had learned from Howard more than even Howard dreamed himself capable of imparting.

But it must be admited that when Keeneyes assured Howard that nothing had happened seriously to his wife, he had spoken rather to quiet the frantic husband than from sure knowledge. At the same time he had believed his encouraging words.

He now set himself to work; we cannot say more seriously to work, for the detective was never more serious than when questioning a possible informant; but he worked in a new direction. This direction led him to Amonia.

He found Mrs. Willis' maid at the house, distractedly searching from room to room, though she knew perfectly well that every wall had been most minutely examined and every floor scrutinized without the finding of a footmark, or, indeed, any unusual sign.

"This is folly," said the detective, stopping her. "This house has been run through a fine tooth comb, from roof to cellar. I want to find out something from you, Amonia, and it is in regard to tramps. Have any tramps been to this house within the last two years?"

"I have only worked here about three months."

"Very good. Three months will do. Have tramps come here within three months?"

"Why, yes, several, of course."

"Did the same one ever repeat his visit?"

"I don't know one tramp from another," said Amonia, resentfully.

"But you know their general appearance?"

"Which is strong and healthy," said Amonia, "and well enough dressed."

"Then you never saw the same one return?"

"I might."

"How many might you have seen return?"

"Well, there was one tramp—"

"Ah, exactly. Now, that is what I want you to tell me."

"He seemed to come back again, about two months after he had first come."

"That is to say, you thought he returned?"

"I said that he seemed to come back."

"Good."

"But he didn't," added Amonia.

"He seemed to come, but he didn't come?"

"Yes, sir."

"But pray, explain, Amonia, I am quite lost."

"I mean that when he first showed up at the back door, two months later, I thought at first that it was the same tramp who had showed up at the kitchen door two months ago. But it wasn't."

"What made you think it was the same?"

"Looked like the same shape, and clothes, and face."

"What made you think it wasn't the same?"

"Because when he spoke, he spoke different. And when I looked closer he looked different."

"Good! And now, how did he speak differently?"

"The first time he talked like you, and the second time like an Irishman."

"Let us understand this clearly. How do you mean, by talking like me?"

"I mean kinder mushy and indistinct, like he was ashamed to open his mouth like a man," said Amonia, in explanatory phrasing.

"Ha!" said Keeneyes, not very well pleased. "That will do. Very well. And the other time, he spoke like a man, did he?"

"Yes, sir, open and bold like."

"And cornbready instead of mushy, I take it?"

"Like an Irishman, as I told you," returned Amonia.

"And you say he looked different, too, although he looked the same?"

"In general, he looked like the same man; but yet he didn't."

"That is interesting. How did he look different?"

"Well, in a way, he was changed."

"Yes, yes, so I understand. Was his nose different?"

"Did I examine his nose," cried Amonia indignantly.

"Well, then, was it his mouth.

"I never looked at no mouth," retorted Amonia. "It was his generalment that was different."

Keeneyes repeated thoughtfully, his head on one side, "Ah, yes, yes, his generalment. Very good. Quite a word, Amonia. But may we not say his complexion?"

"Now that you say complexion, I guess that was it."

"His complexion was different?"

"That was it."

"It had changed to a sort of yellow, hadn't it?"

"Now that you say yellow, I guess so."

"When was this tramp on the premises the last time?"

"A day or two ago."

"You say a day or two ago; was it yesterday?"

"No, it was the day before yesterday."

"What did he want?"

"Something to eat, and everything to wear."

"You gave him nothing?"

"'Course not."

"Did he come into the house?"

"'Course not."

"When he left here, which way did he go?"

Amonia pointed. Keeneyes looked in the direction, and observed a narrow lane which ran, as a side street, to the last houses on that side of Lumberburg, then became a country road, and disappeared in the woods west of town.

"He went down that alley, did he?" Keeneyes asked.

"Yes, he did; and I watched him till he had disappeared behind them trees of the woods. And I ain't seen him since, and never expect to, and wouldn't know him if I did, and don't know anybody else that would," said Amonia, in a tone of finality, as she turned away.

Keeneyes set forth toward the woods. It was about 2 o'clock in the morning.

A great moon was swinging from a cloudless sky; it had risen about an hour after the tragedy at the Willis mansion.

Keeneyes looked up at it with a frown.

When he had needed light most, the darkness had been impenetrable.

And now, when he desired secrecy above all else, the clouds had vanished, and the moon showered its silvery rays about him.

However, in spite of these natural difficulties, the detective never paused until he reached the margin of the woods.

Having once slipped into the shelter of thick bushes and towering forest trees, to whose clinging vines he was indebted for additional protection, the detective felt himself comparatively safe from discovery.

He believed himself to be upon the eve of an amazing discovery.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was not from mere hazard that Keeneyes had taken the road to the dense woods just west of Lumberburg.

It was not merely because Amonia had informed him that the last time she had seen a certain tramp, that tramp had vanished down the alley leading to the woods, and had finally disappeared among its trees.

Nor was it wholly, or even principally, because the tramp who had thus gone to the woods two days ago, had been of a curious yellowish complexion.

That a mysterious tramp should have gone to the woods, or should even have hidden there, two days ago, would not warrant an indefinite search there at this late hour.

While talking to Amonia, as she stood in the moon-lighted yard, with the neighbors coming and going, and the air resounding with the excited voices of the searchers, Keeneyes had made a discovery.

This discovery, to a casual eye, would have told nothing; but to the detective it explained much.

The discovery consisted of nothing but a slight depression, or rather two slight depressions, in the grass at the side of the house. The brilliant beams of an old moon revealed these depressions almost as plainly as if it had been daylight. The depressions did not amount to holes in the ground; they simply indicated that heavy weights had rested upon the grass—two distinct objects had pressed down the vegetation.

This was not all; for, had it been, the detective, for all his acumen, must have been left in perplexity if, indeed, he had thought anything about the matter. But so far from being all, these two depressions were significant because of their position.

They were directly under the window of the Willis bedroom, and they were under that especial window which Howard, on being aroused at midnight, had been amazed to find wide open.

It will be remembered that when Howard was aroused—he knew not how, unless by the subconscious awareness of a strange yellow Presence in his bedchamber—he had found this window open, though he was positive that it had been securely fastened before his retirement.

The two depressions, then, were under this window, and about four feet from the foundation of the house. While Keeneyes was talking to Amonia, tormenting her with questions about any possible tramp, and especially about the tramp who had come at two different

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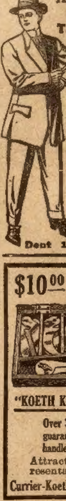

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times to the house, he had been covertly staring at these two depressions.

At one time he dropped his hat, as by accident, between the two depressions—which were about two and a half or three feet apart—and in picking up the hat he had taken care to place his hand into each of the hollows—hollows in the greenery which to Amonia were imperceptible. On straightening himself with his recovered hat, Keeneyes had carelessly held his palm toward the light to examine it.

He found what he had expected.

Upon his hand was a faint yellowish stain.

It was the stain of yellow clay, resembling the stains that had been made upon the dining room by the uplifted ladder. The conclusion was justifiable that these two depressions under the window had been produced by a clay-stained ladder. It followed from this supposition that Howard Willis' wife had descended the ladder from the bedroom window. Possibly she had come down by herself; probably she had been brought down by the "Yellow Being."

One consideration called for thought; the ladder that had been used in the dining room, in other words, Howard's ladder—that ladder which had had a mysterious way of journeying at night—could not be the ladder which had been leaning against the house. It was some other ladder, and yet, though a different one, was stained precisely like Howard's, by yellow clay.

When Amonia indicated the woods as the place where she had last seen her tramp vanish, Keeneyes started down the lane with no definite purpose of continuing all the way to the woods. He was decided to do so by noticing, as he passed the gateway, that there was a yellowish streak across the top of the fence, and a small lump of clay had fallen to the ground. Evidently the ladder had been carried in this direction; and, since it had started down the alley-way, it must have gone all the distance to the woods, since there was no feasible hiding place for it short of that destination.

Therefore Keeneyes was convinced that wherever Mrs. Willis had gone, and wheresoever the "Yellow Being" had vanished, the ladder itself, this strange second ladder, must have gone to the woods, and that only a short time-ago.

On reaching the woods, which was surrounded by a barbed wire fence, he was relieved to find that where the road approached this fence at the nearest point, a particle of clay adhered to the top wire. Evidently, the ladder had been dragged over the fence. It was, therefore, with no little triumph that Keeneyes plunged into the thickets, bent upon a thorough but at the same time a most discreet exploration of the silent surroundings.

The night was very still. The wealth of unrestrained moonlight fell in glaring patches in the waste places, but, where the vines hung thickest, it was unable to penetrate. No wind was stirring. Occasionally some small animal of the wild life made leaves crinkle and twigs protest; but for the most part nothing was to be heard but one melancholy owl, which sounded its inquiry with something like a human voice.

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CHAPTER XXV.

Keeneyes crouched in the woods and listened.

It occurred to him that the cry of the owl did not sound altogether owl-like.

Was it possible that this cry was being produced by a human being?

If so, was it not most likely that he who uttered it was the same who had caused so much excitement and alarm that night?

The cry came again.

Then all was silence.

The detective waited for it to sound again, but he waited in vain.

Still uncertain as to the agency that had disturbed him, the detective began to creep in the direction of the solemn hooting. Although he had heard it but twice, he was pretty sure of the place whence it had issued.

As he drew near the thick underbrush that surrounded the clump of trees, whence the night-bird's call had seemed to issue, the detective made a discovery which in itself was but slight. This discovery consisted in a few broken twigs that lay upon the ground, and an appearance as of the thicket having been entered recently.

Keeneyes crept into the bushes at the place where they had been entered before, and in a short time made another and more important discovery.

His foot had been resisted by a solid object lying upon the ground.

It was a ladder.

It seemed certain that this must be the ladder by means of which the midnight intruder had entered Howard Willis' bedroom window.

Keeneyes, more cautious in his movements, resolved upon exploring every inch of ground of the thicket. He was aided by the moonlight, which, while brilliant in the clearings, was unable to discover the discreet searcher to any spying eye.

The call of the night owl no longer sounded upon the air.

The detective was unable to detect any mysterious rustling in the bushes.

With the utmost caution, he set forth upon his tour of inspection, half doubled up when he was not crawling upon hands and knees.

At the end of half an hour, he returned to his starting point, that is to say, to the ladder.

His search had been unavailing.

Not a clew had been discovered.

Sure that nobody was near, the detective cautiously drew the ladder out into a cleared space, where the moonlight could fall upon it.

As he had anticipated, the ends of the ladder were stained by yellowish clay.

Keeneyes restored the ladder exactly as it had been found.

Then he left the thicket.

A minute examination of the road assured him that it was deserted.

The detective set forth briskly and presently had returned to Lumberburg.

As a result of his recent explorations, all he had gained was the knowledge that the second ladder—that is, the ladder not belonging to Howard Willis—had been carried to the woods and left there. This fact, while of some interest, appeared to be of no importance.

As to the whereabouts of Mrs. Willis, it was evident that if the "Yellow Being" who had so terrified Howard had carried her through the window down the ladder, he could not have borne her in an unconscious condition so far as the woods. If she had been carried away, she had either been driven or must have been secreted nearby.

Now, Keeneyes felt positive that she had not been carried off in a carriage, or buggy, else he would have seen prints of the horses or the wheels or both.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that if Mrs. Willis had departed willingly, she might have walked as far as the woods, or farther. But what hypothesis could possibly account for her willingly leaving her husband in a state of terror and fearful danger, to go off and thus remain in ignorance of his fate?

If she had gone willingly it might be inferred that the entrance of the "Yellow Being" had been with her connivance. Now, when the detective recalled the gentle bearing and modest face of Mrs. Willis, he could not think her guilty of so horrible a conspiracy.

At the same time, while he could not believe this, he could imagine it, and he told himself that while almost impossible, it was not entirely so.

If Mrs. Willis had willingly run away, she must have admitted the midnight intruder. In that case, it was she who had raised the window for him to enter. In that case, if he had carried the ladder to the woods, she had doubtless gone with him. But why carry the ladder away? What possible point could be gained by hiding the lader in the bushes? If it was a case of elopement nothing would be gained, and a good deal of valuable time would be lost by stopping to conceal the manner in which the room was left.

In fact, if Mrs. Willis had eloped with the so-called tramp, it would have been to her advantage for the ladder to be found leaning against her open window, so it might be supposed that some one had come in and kidnaped her.

But even if Mrs. Willis had gone voluntarily, she might have hidden near the house; if she had been forced away, she was certainly still near her own home. There was more reason, therefore, for looking near home than abroad. As for the ladder, that was inexplicable; but at present the whereabouts of Mrs. Willis was of more consequence than an understanding of all the ladders in the county. Keeneyes disliked extremely to be obliged to drop one clew to search for another, but he found the present case urgent.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Keeneyes began his investigations anew, now with the object of seeking any possible hiding place within easy reach of the Willis mansion.

He began with the mansion itself; and, although he had not only searched every nook and cranny of it minutely, and knew that at least a hundred of the neighbors, to say nothing of the town officials, had gone all over it, yet Keeneyes, whose love of methodical ways amounted to something of a fault, examined the house again.

He had been sure he would find no clew, and he had been right. The next building to the mansion was a woodhouse. Keeneyes had, of course, searched the woodhouse, from the side wall of which the Willis ladder had so often mysteriously disappeared. He found in the shed nothing but wood.

It did not seem at all possible that Mrs. Willis could be hiding under the wood, which, for the most part, was neatly piled up and arranged for stove use. Nevertheless, acting upon his recent theory that Mrs. Willis might be voluntarily hiding, he made sure that the wood was intact. At one place he found where it had been hastily thrown in an irregular heap. Still, this was doubtless at the point whence Amonia was accustomed to take the wood for her kitchen. The disorder at this place was doubtless due to Amonia.

But suppose, as a matter of fact, it was not? Suppose the chaotic condition of that corner was significant? Well, in that case, the detective would discover its significance. Passing down the narrow aisle that had been left between high regular walls of split wood, the detective reached the disorderly corner. An ax lay upon the ground; there were chips scattered about. Yes, this must be the spot at which the wood was torn down from the neat stacks, to be borne into the house.

The woodhouse was not entirely dark. The moonlight struggled through some wood that had been banked against the single-pane window near the eaves. This light fell conveniently upon the place under consideration and lighted up the sticks, the ax and the chips—nothing else was revealed. As Keeneyes mused upon this commonplace view, some one looked into the doorway. It was a neighbor.

"Oh, I've been all over this place," he called.

"Yes, and so have I," called another. It was the sheriff. Lumberburg was not large enough to possess such civic luxuries as policemen.

"Very well," answered Keeneyes, as if he meant to give up the search.

The men ran on, seeking fresh fields Keeneyes sank upon his knees in the distant corner and began lifting the sticks, in order to clear away a part of the ground. He drew the ax to one side, then removed some of the wood.

He had not made much progress at this seemingly futile labor when he fancied he could hear a slight stirring farther away in the woodpile. Doubtless the rats had taken the alarm. Keeneyes became more cautious in his movements, but he did not cease to remove the wood. The ground before him was hard and dry, such as becomes any well-appointed woodhouse, but a repetition of the stirring sound lured on the detective to further investigations.

Almost at once he had his reward.

He had come to a wooden flooring which evidently covered the remainder of the ground. Here was something strange—that only a part of the woodhouse should have a wooden floor, and that this part should be the part covered by the disordered wood. Keeneyes now ceased to exercise caution, for he was in a hurry to solve what he believed to be a profound mystery. He threw aside the wood with no regard to the noise made by doing so, and in a very brief time came to a trap-door in this flooring. Having found the trap-door, he could now see it might be easily reached by any one knowing of its situation, without removing any of the sticks of wood, except a few that hid the crevices.

The detective snatched up the ax and was about to pry open the trap-door when he was startled by a pistol shot, which had been fired beneath him.

No doubt could longer exist as to there being a secret cellar, or chamber of some sort, under this wooden flooring.

Keeneyes inserted the blade of the ax into the crevice and pried up the door.

At the same time, from below, came a sudden shriek of agony.

Keeneyes forced up the door, and the smoke from burnt powder stung his eyes and nostrils.

He started into the space the trap-door had opened below him. It was intensely dark down there and he could see nothing.

(Continued next week.)

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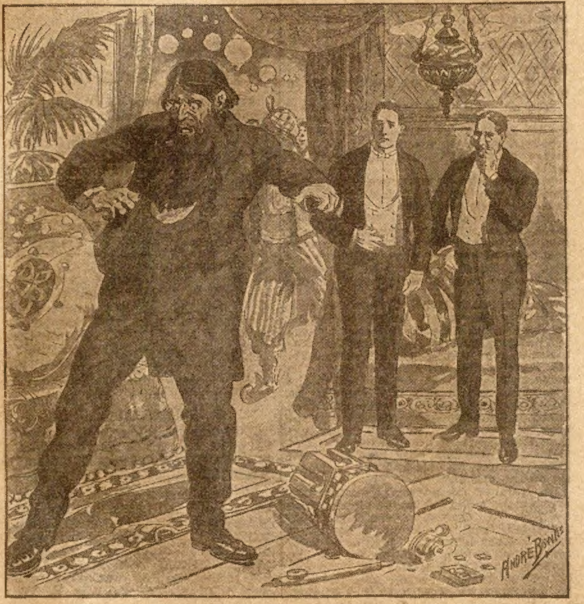

He gave a great cry.

Begun in No. 16, April 22. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, or our agents, or by mail from the office of publication.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT WAS a heavy hour, that one in which I prepared to quit Magnolia Place. I was entirely conscious that suspicions would ultimately follow me; yet, when I thought of my mother I was prepared to go whatever might befall me. Besides, now that all the well-springs of good in me had opened toward Marguerite, I felt it impossible to endure myself there, my life before her being so frightful a lie.

Thus it fell that the dawn found me on the road to Punta Gorda. I had left a sealed note upon the dining-room table addressed to Marguerite. It ran as follows:

"Mrs. Stanwood:—Considerations of some moment, which I do not feel at liberty to wholly explain, have determined me to go away for a time. I go in matters relative to my father, and from this fact you may conjecture the direction of my journey. It seems probable, from information fallen in my way, that long absence on his part will induce a state of public opinion compromising to my good name. For this and other reasons, I go. Without desiring to alarm you in the least, I will state that were I able soon to bring my father alive and well, to you, that fact might turn aside from me a possible misfortune, I beg that you will not misinterpret my hasty departure. Since my return from Garcia I have been considering it. It is now four o'clock in the morning, and, since I bade you good night I have not slept, but have fully weighed the matter, and have determined upon this course. Above all considerations of self there are elements which make this journey, on my part, a sacred duty.

"I wish for few things more sincerely than that you may not feel unhappy or disturbed. If that occurs to me, while absent, which shall promise in any way to add to your peace of mind, I shall take pleasure in writing to you again. I am, most obediently yours—FRANCIS STANWOOD."

Portions of this were written in sincerity, all of it in shame and sorrow. I felt it to be deceptive, hollow, abominable. But there seemed no alternative. I could not bring myself to state the unvarnished facts, and could not leave the woman I loved, like a brutal craven, without an attempt to stay the storm which finally must fall upon her.

As I now rode forward through the cool, milky atmosphere of early dawn, my mind was still filled with the impressions of that last hour. The solemn hush which lay upon the house, the moon fallen dead in the west, the ghost-like statues standing among the flowers, and Marguerite up there in her chamber, a lily floating on the deep of dreams. The packing of my father's diary and other needed objects in my hand-bag, the saddling of the good bay colt, my last look up at Marguerite's windows, my ride across the bridge, which seemed to shout to my soul with awful memories, and the journey thus far through the forest, all were near and vivid.

By ten o'clock I made the little house in that cup-like dent of meadow, at the tip of the great prong of water which the sea thrust inland, the spot where I had first encountered the interesting stranger. I led the horse to the spring in the dilapidated orchard and let him drink, and also quenched my own thirst. In the grass were impressions of human feet, and, going to the open door, I saw that a fire was smoldering in the little fireplace, and that there were other meager evidences of occupancy. However, the place was now deserted. I ate some fruit from the orchard, and, having permitted my hungry horse to nip the fresh grass for a time, I mounted and rode onward. Midway from noon to night the good colt carried me into Punta Gorda.

I put the animal in a public barn, explaining that a colored man, bearing an order written and signed by myself, would presently call for it. This order I had inclosed in the letter left for Marguerite to be handed to Uncle Peter.

That night I spent in a hotel of the town, and though I had passed a number of years in the schools of the place, so much had five years of growth and absence put me out of mind, I seemed regarded as a stranger. There were those in the vicinity whose hand I should have been glad to clasp once more, and who, I believe, remembered me as I once was with pleasure, but now I had reason to be gratified that I was looked upon as one unknown. I craved obscurity. In the morning a steamer from Tampa, bound for New Orleans, touched at the wharf, and when it passed out of Charlotta harbor it bore me with it. I went to the stateroom assigned me, and, stretching myself upon the bed there, let the waves rock me into slumber.

When I awoke it was near night, and a loud, long-drawn, musical voice was making the announcement to the occupants of the grand saloon that supper was being served in the dining-room. As respects this world, seemingly no more important information could possibly have been imparted, at least if one might judge from the avidity with which the information was acted upon. For in an incredibly brief space of time every passenger about the ship seemed fled to the room where was spread the repast. As I went out through the gilded, many-mirrored saloon I found it empty, save for the presence of a single man.

This person, if appearances count in such an estimate, was worth noting. He was somewhat above the medium height, finely formed and exquisitely dressed, with an even profile, a clear milky skin, bronze-gold hair and mustache, large dark blue eyes, and a distinguished, reposeful air. As he walked down the saloon, from what point I know not, he moved along over the carpet with inexpressible softness and ease. He had the atmosphere of one absolutely in possession of himself, and through that fact had acquired the larger half of the world.

I had paused at my stateroom door, and as he passed me, leisurely turning a gold-headed cane in air at every second step, he swept his keen eyes over me from head to foot, and made a faint obeisance with his head. As he passed out of the grand cabin, he threw me a swife glance from the tail of his eye, and, humming a soft air disappeared.

I did not see him at table when I went to the evening meal, but, after that had been dispatched, and I had gone on deck and was watching the tropic stars swarm into the sky, he came and stood not far away, looking down upon the water.

"It is very beautiful," he murmured. I could not determine if he were addressing me or merely musing, and so remained silent.

"It is difficult to decide which is the finer, the sky or the sea," he went on, lifting his large eyes to my face. "I beg your pardon, but could you accommodate me with a light?"

He held a cigar between his fingers. His hands were like a woman's, and a fine gem of some sort glinted from the third finger of his left hand. His manner was suave and extremely well bred.

I felt in my pockets. "I seldom smoke," I said, "and am sorry, but at present I haven't a match."

"Thank you. It is of no consequence," he said, agreeably, "Excuse me a moment." And he strolled across the deck, and presently came back, moving in his easy fashion. "I succeeded in finding a match or two," he said with a smile. "Would you care to smoke?" He held out a beautiful cigar case. "I think you will find them reasonably good." He had a mellow, caressing voice that flowed like oil.

"Thank you," I said, and took one of the proffered cigars. He struck a match against the rail and held it toward me. After the fragrant weed was burning, he tossed his cigar over the rail, and lighting a fresh one, withdrew a step or two and stood looking at the water.

"It is of exquisite flavor, this," I said.

"The cigar? Oh, it is not entirely bad. I have a friend in Havana who selects them for me. His judgment is not always so delicate as his courtesy. However, in the matter of getting a choice quality I find it the preferable way." He smiled, holding the burning tobacco before him, and looking musingly at the wavering smoke. It curled upward like a spiral stair of blue gauze, seemingly a fit ladder for the most delicate sprite that fancy ever conceived.

"The smoke is a trifle thick," he said, tossing the weed into the water. "It should be whiter." He lighted another and went on smoking.

"I never weary of watching the false stars in the water," he said after a moment. "They have a limpid, smiling look denied the true ones of the sky. Sometimes they burst into diamond powder and are lost in the spray. What a fine effect that was! Ah, look at that!"

"It is exceedingly pretty," I said.

"Yes, truly; few things could be finer." He smoked quietly for a few moments. "Excuse me, but you go, of course, to New Orleans?"

"Yes, sir."

He took a card from his pocket, and with a slight bow, offered it me. The deck lamps were aglow behind us, and, glancing at the card, I read, "Lancewood Shirlaw, New Orleans."

I bowed. "I have no card," I said. "My name is Stantree." It suddenly occurred to me to thus alter my name as a matter of caution. I was a man, in a sense, fleeing from justice; I had a prob-

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GENTLE JABS.

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Fast clocks and fast young men are due for setbacks.

Some women are like some old hens—set in their ways.

The ship in which many fond hopes go down is courtship.

Too many political platforms are made up of gang planks.

The love of other men's money may be the root of much evil.

Unless a thing is uncomfortable it seldom becomes fashionable.

It's a shame the way society shocks the people who are not in it.

Some men would almost as soon be good as to be caught being bad.

An apology is a poultice that doesn't always draw the soreness out.

Don't wait until your bread becomes stale before casting it upon the waters.

When a man's red hair begins to turn gray he is willing to let it go at that.

When a woman borrows trouble she insists on paying it back three or four times.

Men have more temptations than women because they know where to look for them.

From many a woman's point of view a bird on her hat is worth a back yard full of poultry.

It is naturally the strait and narrow path for those who are paying for the new pavement.

Most people who are willing to loose the strings of their purse know in advance that it is empty.

There may be a million reasons why a man can love an heiress, and each one of them is the size of a dollar.

It's up to some suffragette to advance the theory that Solomon's wisdom was due to the advice handed him by the numerous Mrs. Solomons.

lem involving life or death before me, and I hoped not to miscarry from lack of discretion. I desired the acquaintance of people, and welcomed this elegant stranger's proffer of companionship as something containing a likelihood of information touching my object.

He glanced at me keenly when I had spoken my name. "I am gratified to meet you, Mr. Stantree," he said, offering me his white, shapely hand. "Your name strikes me oddly but agreeably, for I have a friend bearing a somewhat similar name. My friend's name is Stanwood. So you see how nearly alike they are. Also my own first name is Lancewood. Quite a collection of fine timber, you see." He ended with an agreeable laugh.

"Of hardwoods?" I suggested.

He laughed again. "Very good, that! but not true, I hope! By the by, may I ask if New Orleans is your home?"

"No, sir; this will be my first visit to the place. I am recently from the North."

"Ah, yes; I see. You are visiting old scenes, no doubt, since I would fancy you were a native of the South. I judge from your pronunciation and generally agreeable air."

"Thank you. Yes, I was born and reared through much of my boyhood at Punta Gorda."

"Ah, indeed! My friend Stanwood lives, I think, in that vicinity."

"I have heard of him. He is a physician, I believe, and lives something more than thirty miles from the town."

"Yes, precisely. I have heard him say so. He is a handsome person, and, I think, very talented."

"I believe you are quite right. I have heard a similar opinion expressed by others. You have known him long?"

He reflected an instant, but I felt that the pause was rather hesitancy than a mental operation. "Two years; probably more," he ventured, running his keen eye inquiringly across my face.

"Have you met him recently? You will pardon my curiosity, I trust, when I say that he is a relative of mine."

"Ah, indeed!" He thought a moment again, turning his eyes quickly once or twice across my face. "It was quite a month ago that I last saw him, I believe. Might I inquire the relationship?"

"He was my mother's husband at one time. They were separated."

He looked mystified and at sea. "Such things are very unfortunate," I said. "By the way, at what time do we make New Orleans?"

"Tomorrow evening, I think, if we make the usual speed."

"Thank you. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

I lifted my hat and went away to my stateroom. I wished to whet his curiosity, to make him talk, and few courses provoke confidences like a skillful reserve. He had not sought me without first having measured me. I was conscious of that, and felt that behind his polished urbanity a purpose of some sort lay masked.

CHAPTER XIX.

After I had retired that night I lay awake for a long time, thinking of this gentleman and the many phases of my trouble. If he knew my father, and that much was beyond question, he might be acquainted with the important person whose name began with B. Or, failing of that, he might possibly understand the tongue in which much of my father's diary was written! He had no doubt boarded the boat at Tampa. My father, it would appear from words once let fall by Marguerite, had some sort of interests there. On the morrow I would renew the stranger's acquaintance.

Dismissing him, I thought of Marguerite. Time would be heavy for her, living there day after day in the great house alone, save for the black people. I remembered with an uneasy pang that her wound would have no experienced hand to dress it. I had left no directions respecting its treatment. On the morrow I would prepare a letter and place it in the steward's care, to be mailed at Punta Gorda upon the boat's return. At last, with her image floating in my mind, I fell asleep.

I awoke an hour before dawn and could not persuade myself to slumber more, but lay listening to the wash of waters along the ship's side, feeling each pulse-stroke of the distant engine pass through the body of the ship like the faint jar of a beating heart. As dawn came on I arose and went on deck.

Presently others came on deck, among them Lancewood Shirlaw, as pink and fresh as the morning. He lifted his hat to me and walked airily up and down, his handsome head thrown back a little, his cane turning now and again in air. He did not engage myself or others in conversation, but bowed to right and left, and paced to and fro with his great blue eyes fixed dreamily upon the swaying waters.

However, after breakfast had been eaten, and I had again ascended to the upper deck, he came leisurely along the rail to the point where I was sitting.

"Time and place seem propitious for dissipation," he remarked with a smile. "Do you feel equal to one of these this morning, Mr. Stantree? You had the goodness to approve them last evening; perhaps you are not so brave this morning! He held the fine cigar case toward me with a bow.

"Thank you. I think I have not lost my courage," I said, taking one of the weeds.

He smiled, critically inspected the cigars in the case, tossed two of them over the rail without remark, placed the third between his white teeth, and returned the case to his pocket. He then struck a match upon the sole of his patent leather shoe, held it to my cigar and his own, sat down a little way from me, and, nursing the gold head of his cane, looked out upon the water.

"It is very fresh and pleasant, Mr. Stantree."

"Yes, I feel it so."

"You mentioned having come recently from the North. Might I ask from what portion?"

"From Chicago."

"Ah, yes; it promises to be a very great city, does it not?"

"With sufficient time the largest in the world, I think."

"Indeed! All who have lived there I observe are infected with a somewhat similar opinion. It seems the mother of prophets, at least prophets of its own future greatness." He ended with a smile.

"And contrary to the worn axiom, her prophets are honored within her own gates for their predictions."

He laughed pleasantly. "That is generous, indeed. It is an exception to the rule. I fancy, however, that there may be a basis of probability for the expectation. It seems reasonable to suppose a great cause back of so general an impression."

"Yes, it lies, I think, in the fact that ultimately this country is to become the greatest on the globe, followed by the seemingly justified impression that between the eastern and western mountain regions, and the British line to the north and the sea at the south, lies the greatest natural empire in the world. In this magnificent space it is thought that finally a larger number of forceful, progressive people shall find life and action than elsewhere; hence the very natural belief that the chief city of this region must, perforce, become at last the greatest on the planet."

He watched me narrowly as I spoke, blowing the pale blue smoke slowly from his lips. "It isn't bad, the logic," he consented, "and you group it nicely. I really cannot offer an objection to your conclusion, unless, possibly, interfering economic laws or conditions might prove disastrous to the region you describe by diverting its wealth to the eastern seaboard. In such an event the splendid dream might fail to be realized." He smiled affably, like one wishing to agree, yet compelled to a reservation for the sake of conversation. After that we talked of economics, and divers subjects.

At length, making a convenient hinge of a remark he had just let fall, I opened the subject which I had held all the while in mind. "I have lately read something savoring of that," I said, "though in a different field. It was some sort of writing, as I remember, on Eastern occultism. It had to do with the mysterious feats of the Yogi of India, and that kind of thing. I thought it very interesting."

He flipped the white ash from the end of his cigar with his jeweled finger, then threw the remainder of the weed overboard, and lighting a fresh one, glanced up without a visible trace of interest in his face.

"Ah, yes. I once looked that up a bit. I found it diverting, but rather deep for amusement; and, of course, that is all an American or European could pretend to find in it."

"Certainly. The matter which fell in my way was written in part in an Eastern tongue of some sort, and that prevented me from understanding it clearly or enjoying it much. I made out that some of those high caste Indians did very remarkable things, however."

"Oh, yes," he assented, with a faint yawn, "very wonderful, indeed. You say you were not able to determine the origin of the language with which you were unfamiliar?"

"Oh, no, I could make nothing of it at all. I fancy it was Arabic or Hindustani, though I am hardly competent to venture an opinion."

"You haven't the work with you, Mr. Stantree?"

"No. However, I think I have a fragment of similar writing. I purposed asking some one's opinion of it. Would you care to see it, Mr. Shirlaw?"

"Thank you. It would serve to pass the time. I have made a rather wide study of the tongues, but not a deep one. The labor demanded is too great. There are many languages of which I am entirely ignorant. I fear you will find me of little service."

I arose, and going to my stateroom, took my father's diary from the handbag, and cut out one of the leaves with my knife. The larger portion of the leaf was written over in the unknown language of which I have spoken. I brought it to the stranger. Placing gold rimmed glasses upon his high bred nose, he studied it musingly for several minutes.

"I am not familiar wth the tongue," he said at length, "but believe I could make it out a little. The matter of the writing, I take it, refers to the subject of which we were speaking, but it is far from clear to me."

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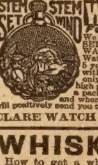

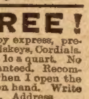

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He ran the leaf over in all directions quickly as he ceased studying it, and handed it back to me. I expected he would inquire with his unoffensive show of interest, whether or not I knew the writer of the mysterious tongue, but he kept a well bred silence on that head.

"I fancy there may be a person, or persons, in the city who could decipher it readily for you, but I do not call to mind such a one just at this moment," he said. "I trust, Mr. Stantree, that we may see something of each other in the city. In such an event I shall find pleasure in doing you any service which may fall in my way." He ended the sentence with a smile, and rose to his feet.

"Thank you. I shall certainly be gratified to continue an acquaintance so well begun, Mr. Shirlaw, the more since I am not aware that I have the good fortune to know any one in *' · town."

"Ah! Then you may find an old resident like myself a real convenience. Have you any particular stopping place in view? I might be of service in that regard, you know."

"I shall probably stop at a hotel temporarily. Later on I may select lodgings elsewhere in the city, as I purpose staying about the place a number of weeks. I think I should not care to go into the most expensive quarter. I am something of a countryman, you know."

He smiled upon me agreeably. "What ever you are, Mr. Stantree, you are a gentleman. You must pardon my openness. It is rather ill-bred, I believe, to make love to a man in that way. As for the hotels, there is the Royal, the St Charles, the Victorian, the Bordeau—oh, many, and of infinite variety of cost and style. As for the districts of the city, you will find the French quarter the more picturesque. I am situated in apartments on the border of the old, yet, quite convenient to the new; at 80 Rue Royale. I am a bachelor, Mr. Stantree. and I trust you will look in upon my den when convenient. However close or distant the relationship, I shall not forget that you are a relative of my friend Stanwood."

"Thank you. I shall certainly take advantage of your kindness."

When he had gone I sat thinking for a time. Why did I not inquire after the person whose name began with B? Yet, what an absurdity! Doubtless ten thousand people in New Orleans had names beginning with that letter! Perhaps this Lancewood Shirlaw was the man himself! It might transpire that my father had cause to secrete the person's real name by a cabalistic letter. This affable stranger evidently had a deeper knowledge of occultism than he had cared to let me see. Or, knowing nothing of psychic influence at all, he may have affected familiarity with it only as so much vanity. I had a lurking doubt of his sincerity, yet he was indescribably agreeable.

I saw the fine stranger honoring others with his courtesy during the day, and more than once I received a smile from him. Once I saw him playing cards with several well dressed men as I passed the door of the smoking room, and again he was turning the music for a lady who performed at the piano in the grand saloon.

As the day was coming to an end we drew into the Mississippi. Other steamers were going with us, coughing and struggling against the mighty coffee-colored stream; others were coming down, moving swiftly and easily, with smoke plumes and flags streaming rearward. Upon the banks were suburban villas, rioting in roses and greenery; here and there a little town, and here and there a broad esplanade with carriages and moving human figures; then thousands of houses, railway trains coming and going, boats backing out from piers and others pulling in, an endless clangor of bells and cry of whistles and hiss of steam, the vast clutter and smoke of seemingly miles of levee, and then our steamer, wheezing and snuffling and occasionally screeching, bumps against the dock and is made fast.

Through it all I somehow seem to see my mother lying in her fragrant satins, away there on her little still hill among the oaks!

Shirlaw passes me on the landing, lifts his hat, smiles, and, geting into a carriage, is driven away. I hand my bag to a dapper colored youth, and, refusing the suggested carriage, we bear off through the French market, by Jackson square to the Hotel Royal.

I am on ground that knew my infancy; I am at the threshold of my life's mystery. Crossing it what shall I find?

CHAPTER XX.

The next morning, before breakfast had been served, and while the city was yet drowsing in dawn's violet and gold, I went out and walked about. I was restless from a night of teasing wakefulness, unhappy thought, and evil dreams. My purpose haunted me, presenting itself to my mind an infinity of times and in endless ways. Not knowing how to solve it or where to begin, the question vexed me as it were some sort of implacable gnat, which settled and settled upon me and would not be driven off.

Following that morning I wandered about the city and its suburbs for an entire week. On the second day after my arrival I quit the hotel and took apartments in the Rue Royale, the half French, half American street in which Shirlaw's lodgings lay, but farther from the river. During this week of sightseeing and indecision I called three times at Shirlaw's apartments, but each time found him absent.

One afternoon, as I was loitering about thus, I stopped at the corner of Conti street and stood looking down the Rue Royale. The houses seemed of every fanciful tint yet discovered by man; slate-blue, chocolate, cinnamon-red, pale rose, canary, ultramarine and gray. The roof lines on either side of the street cut and jagged the blue sky in an astonishing fashion, craggy with balconies and peaked with dormers, and displaying a spidery maze of wrought iron work, leaves and curling tendrils of metal, all along the pitched and tiled roofs and house fronts. Every building had sap-green shutters, and all down the street ran a wilderness of flowers and lattice work.

As I stood studying this medley of hues, angles and infinitesimal curves, a light hand was laid an instant upon my shoulder. I turned; Lancewood Shirlaw was there. With a smile he put out his cool white hand.

"It isn't bad, Mr. Stantree, is it?" he said, sweeping the scene with beaming eyes.

I took his greeting cordially. I was gratified that we had met. "I do not find it so," I said, "unless it is a trifle kaleidoscopic."

He laughed engagingly, lifted his eyeglasses and surveyed the spidery, chaotic vista. "It is a bit difficult to ordinate the details of the perspective," he admitted, musingly. "However, I think it rather interesting."

"Yes, it is everlastingly so; that is the fault I have to find with it. I have gone about your town for a week now doing nothing but gape."

He ran his eye over me approvingly. "You are looking a trifle jaded, Mr. Stantree, if you will pardon the personality. Why haven't you been to see me?"

"I called two or three times, but you were absent."

"Ah! I am indeed sorry for that. If you are at leisure come this evening, Mr. Stantree; or will you be occupied?"

"Thank you. Oh, I have infinite leisure."

He laughed. "That is pleasant. Then, may I expect you?"

"I think so, Mr. Shirlaw."

"Good! We will go to the opera, if you like. After that, if agreeable, we might look about a bit. The internals of a city are most interesting, I think, and those are to be seen only at night, you know. Where are you stopping, if I might inquire, Mr. Stantree?"

I gave him the number and street. "Ah!" he exclaimed, with evident gratification, "on this street! Toward the somewhat Anglicized end! That is good. I am familiar with the house where you have chambers; a genteel and interesting place."

"I find it so, Mr. Shirlaw. I hope you may look in upon me there."

"Thanks. I shall find pleasure in doing so, Mr. Stantree. Come before eight. You remember the number? Yes; that is it. Don't fail me, please." He bowed, smiling, and turned off down Conti-way.

I let my eye follow him a moment. He was faultlessly clad and went forward with that inimitable ease which had first attracted me. During my week of loitering I had looked upon many human figures, but none, I thought, so agreeable to the eye.

I had a few hundreds of dollars, I remember, saved from my year of service in the Northern hospital, and I went at once and purchased such apparel as I could find that might make me more presentable in the evening. When the hour was drawing toward eight I presented myself at Shirlaw's chambers. A stately mulatto youth led me up the fine stairway, and Shirlaw met me with bland smile and outstretched hand upon the landing. With welcoming words he led me into his rooms. These were three or four in number and sumptuously furnished. He treated me with the utmost courtesy, a frank, urbane, generous sort of codiality which was very captivating. When we had talked a little time he brought a bottle of wine and filled glasses of the filmiest, frailest crystal imaginable. When the light liquor fell into the goblets it leaped and sparkled as only champagne may. He bowed and lifted one of the goblets toward me.

"Let me pledge you my good feeling, Mr. Stantree!" he said, smilingly.

"Thank you." I took the goblet of beaded amber and sipped it, looking at him. It had a delicate, ineffable perfume, and was deliciously pungent.

"It is very fine, Mr. Shirlaw," I said.

"It is a Cote d'Or. I think the bouquet very good," he said, modestly. "Some of the Garonnes I fancy are better, and the Lafittes and Montrachets I sometimes think more delicate. However, I do not take wine frequently, and then only of the lightest sort. Champagnes, I think, stimulate more gently and leave less depression, or malaise, as an after effect."

"I so seldom drink liquors of any kind my opinion would hardly be worth expressing," I said, "but I should think, basing my impression on the delicacy and aroma of this, that your judgment was excellent, Mr. Shirlaw."

"Thank you! Thank you! Let me pour you another glass, Mr. Stantree; it is very light."

"I am obliged, but this is quite enough, Mr. Shirlaw."

"Ah! Well, nothing is quite so delicious as a clear head! I commend your self-control. We will light these weeds—I think I can offer you a better cigar, Mr. Stantree, than when we smoked together before. I received a fresh lot from my Havana friend yesterday. Ah! —there—now that we have them burning nicely we will be off!"

(Continued on page eighteen.)

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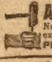

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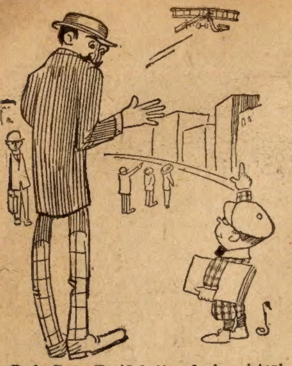


Rude Boy—You'd better duck, mister! Here comes an airship!

Mistaken Kindness.

The servants were abed and the doctor answered the bell himself. A colored man stood on the steps, holding a large package.

"Is Miss Matildah, the cook, at home, sah?" asked the man.

"Yes, but she has retired," returned the doctor.

"Can I leab dis fo' her, sah?"

"Certainly," said the doctor.

He took the bundle, from which flowers and buds were protruding, and after bidding the man good night, carefully carried it to the kitchen, where he deposited it, paper and all, in a pan of water.

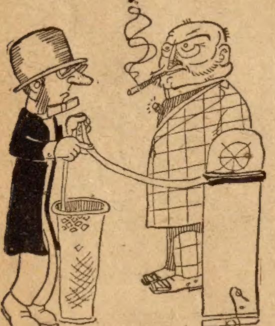
The doctor thought nothing more of the affair until he heard Matilda's angry voice raised in conversation with the maid.

"Ef I had de pusson heah," cried the cook, "dat put mah new spring hat in dis yer dishpan, I'd scald 'im fo' sho'!"

Floored.

"I am sorry to be critical, my dear," said Mr. Lambkin, "but this pie is not the kind that mother used to make—not by a long shot."

"It's too bad, Henry," said Mrs. Lamkin amiably. "I don't know what to do about it. Perhaps you'd better ring her up on the phone and tell her. She sent it over this afternoon."



The Lamb—I've just bought a hundred shares of C. Q. & D. common. Think it's a good buy?

The Wolf—It's a good-by to your money.

An Awful Penalty.

Mayor Whitlock, in an address in Toledo, said of a proposed law:

"New laws must be made to fit new conditions."

Mayor Whitlock smiled.

"You know how," he said, "as the frigid winter season congeals the streams and ravages the woods, tramps are apt to commit some trifling offense in order to be locked up in a snug, warm jail until the time of the singing of birds is come again, and the voice of the turtle is once more heard in the land.

"Well, a Toledo policeman arrested one of these tramps the other day, and on the way to the station house the captive was so delighted that he danced, waved his arms and sang.

"But the policeman said to him very sternly:

" 'Here, keep quiet or I'll let you go.' "

Infant Logic.

A little girl for some days had observed a thick carpet of straw covering the street to deaden the noise for a sick lady in the house opposite.

When the danger had passed and men were removing the straw, she went to her mother and asked:

"Mother, what was the matter over at Mrs. Smith's?"

"God sent Mrs. Smith a new baby," answered her mother.

The child went to the window and stood watching again. Finally she turned and said:

"They pack babies awfully careful, don't they?"

Well Qualified.

Prospective Employer (perusing references)—Have you any knowledge of the silk and satin department?

Applicant—Spent all my life among 'em, sir.

Prospective Employer—And sheets and blankets?

Applicant (forcibly)—Born among 'em, sir.

A Constable Convinced.

"Sorry," said the constable, "but I'll have to arrest ye—you've been drivin' along at the rate of fifty miles an hour."

"You are wrong, my friend," said the driver. "I say I wasn't, and here's a ten-dollar bill that says I wasn't."

"All right," returned the constable, pocketing the money. "With eleven to one against me I ain't goin' to subject the county to th' expense of a trial."

Advising Her Daddy.

"Mary!"

Father's voice rolled down the stairs and into the dim and silent parlor.

"Yes, papa, dear."

"Ask that young man if he has the time."

A moment of silence.

"Yes, George has his watch with him."

"Then ask him what is the time."

"He says it is eleven forty-eight, papa."

"Then ask him if he doesn't think it about bedtime."

"He says, papa," the silvery voice announced impersonally, "he says that he rarely goes to bed before one, but it seems to him that it is a matter of personal preference merely, and that if he were in your place he would go now if he felt sleepy!"

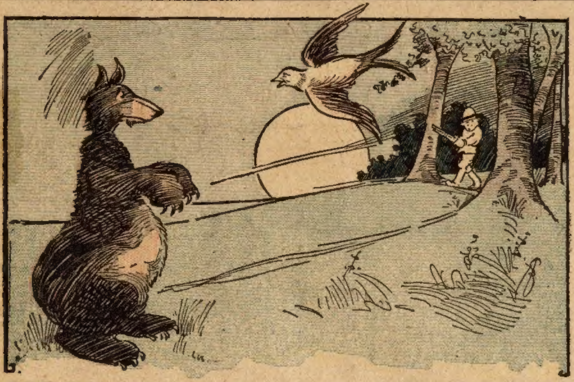
Entirely Too Modest.

Mrs. De Plaine—I am so delighted by my photograph that I have brought you a little present.

Photographer (modestly)—I really don't deserve such a testimonial, madam. Give it to that gentleman over there.

"Does he assist you?"

"Yes. He does the retouching."



Bill Bird—What's up, Bruin?

Bruin—Why, hang it! Here I've been trying to commit suicide for the last three hours and that amateur hunter can't hit the side of a house!

TICKLISH

Mean.

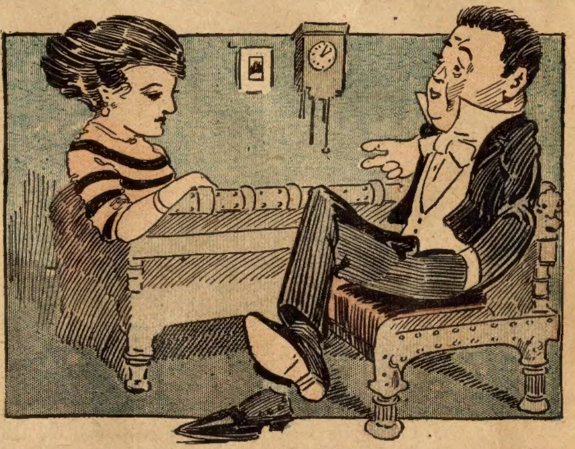
"You used to say," she complained, "that you could hear the rustle of angel's wings whenever I was near you."

"Yes," he bitterly replied, "I thought that was what it was, but I have since learned that it was merely the creaking of your corset."

Interpretation of His Dream.

Boarder—I had a most peculiar dream last night. I dreamed that you let me off on my board bill, that you paid my tailor, my shoemaker and my laundryman. I wonder what is all means?

Landlady—It means that you are all going to move—Judge.



Irena—I just danced with that Mr. Allarms.

Harry—Well, you seem to have pulled through all right.

Irena—Yes; but it was a tight squeeze.

Singularly Fitting.

They were discussing Brown, his charming manner and his lack of moral responsibility in all matters connected with money. "He means to be honest as the sun," said one of his friends, "but he doesn't get around to paying his debts."

"He ought not to have any debts," said another man. "He ought to have what my boy in college wrote me for the other day—'Kathleen Mavourneen' loans."

"What are they?" asked one of the party.

"A 'Kathleen Mavourneen' loan 'may be for years and it may be forever'," said the father.

A School for Conceit.

"I hear you actually encourage your boy to send poetry to the magazines. Do you want your son to become a poet?"

"No; I merely want him to get the conceit knocked out of him."

Trying to Please Employers.

Mistress—I am surprised. You say you were married six months ago, divorced three months ago, and remarried to your husband last night.

Domestic—Yes'm. You see, at the first place he had they wanted a married man, so we got married; but the next place they wanted a single man, so we got divorced, and I came here. Now he's found a place where they want a man for gardening and the wife to cook, so we got married again, and I'm going with him.

Real Foolishness.

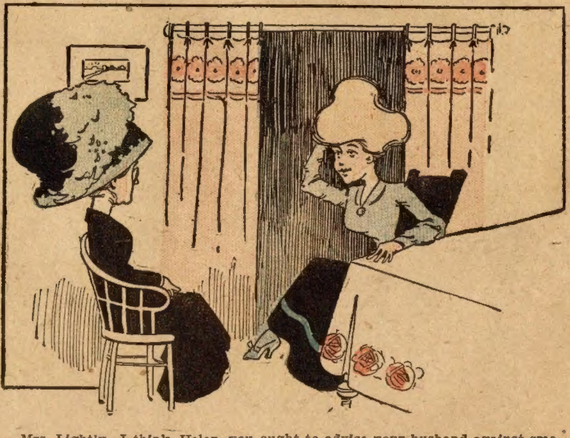
Mrs. Gnaggs—I'll never forget the night you proposed to me. You acted like a perfect fool.

Mr. Gnaggs—That wasn't acting.

A Grand Success.

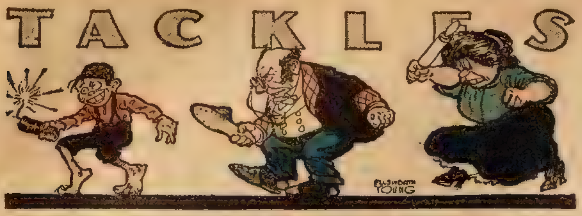
"Miss Ella, was your fair a success?"

"Glorious! All the men had to walk home!"



Mrs. Lightly—I think, Helen, you ought to advise your husband against smoking so much.

Her Friend—I couldn't think of such a thing at this time; why, we need only 13,000 more coupons to get a hand-painted sofa pillow.



Matrimonial Signs.

Spencer—When a man pays attention to a woman it is generally a sign that he wishes to marry her.

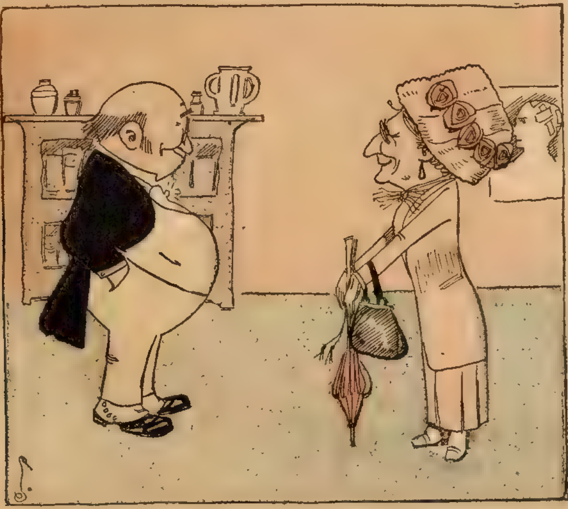
Sinnick—Yes, and when a man doesn't pay attention to a woman it is often a sign that he has married her.

Cause for Anger.

"Mrs. Tinmore is so angry with her dentist she vows she will never pay his bill," says the neighbor.

"Why in the world?" asks the caller.

"Well, she got him to put on a bridge for her, and she complained to him that it did not feel right, but he said it was all right and would not be noticed when she got used to it; and so she kept it, of course, although it seemed to make it hard for her to talk—kind of made her voice thick, you know. And yesterday she called up Mr. Tinmore and asked him to bring home some shoes and shirts for their little boys, and Mr. Tinmore kept her repeating it over and over to him the longest time, until he thought he knew what she wanted. And what do you suppose he brought home? A bottle of soothing sirup!"



Mrs. Newlyrich—Regarding John's appendicitis bear in mind doctor—
Doctor Cuttem—Bear what in mind, madam?
Mrs. Newlyrich—That we want the most expensive operation you have.

Had Enough.

Hogan was playing nurse to the twins on the front porch. The twins were annoyed because each wanted exclusive possession of a solitary kitten, and they were yelling.

A neighbor paused at the gate. "Well, Hogan," he asked, "what would you take for them children of yourn?"

Hogan shifted in his chair. "All the money in the wurruld couldn't buy thim," he declared. "But," he added, "I wouldn't give tin cints apiece for any more like thim."

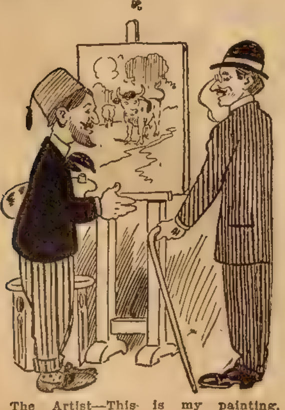
Midnight Philosophy.

Mrs. Squills—Quick! Quick! Wake up! I believe there are burglars downstairs. Go down and see.

Mr. Squills (sleepily)—Nonsense! Nothing but the cat.

Mrs. S—Hark! There! I know there are burglars downstairs.

Mr. S. (nervously)—Well—er—if you know they are there there is no use going down to find out.



The Artist—This is my painting, "Cows in Clover!"
The Critic—Where's the clover?
The Artist—In the cows.

Hard on the Mare.

Twice, as the bus slowly wended its way up the steep Cumberland Gap, the door at the rear opened and slammed. At first those inside paid little heed; but the third time, they demanded to know why they should be disturbed in this fashion.

"Whist," cautioned the driver, "doan't spake so loud; she'll overhear us."

"Who?"

"The mare. Spake low! Shure Oi'm desavin' th' crayture? Every toime she 'ears th' door close, she thinks wan o' yez is gettin' down to walk up th' hill, an' that sort a' raises her sperrits."

Hard to Deny.

As Miss Hypatia Squaretoes reached the culminating point of her lecture on "Woman's Rights and How to Wield Them," she threw back her head and stood in an attitude of defiance.

"Talk of man!" she cried. "What has man ever done for woman?"

"He's furnished the model she's trying her best to imitate!" boomed a manly voice from the rear of the hall; and then a palpitating silence reigned for nearly a minute.

When to Fly High.

First English Sparrow—The Legislatures are offering rewards for our heads. Aren't you scared?

Second English Sparrow—No, I shan't worry until they call us game and pass laws to protect us.

Told Him Why.

Mr. Nicefello (cautiously)—Why are you so cold and distant?

Sweet Girl (quietly)—The fire has gone out and this sofa is too heavy for me to move up to your chair.

Didn't Have It.

Miss Merrill, a teacher in a grade school, had trouble with Johnnie. Johnnie had trouble doing his work, and the authorities finally discovered that his sight was defective. Miss Merrill told Johnnie and sent him home, with a note to his mother. He gazed at the note in horror, then at the teacher, and burst into tears. The note read:

"Johnnie has astigmatism; do not let him return to school until he has been attended to."

Miss Merrill understood his grief better when she received a note from his mother. She read: "I don't know what he done, but I licked him for it. I can't find it on him, and he says he ain't got any; now you better lick him and see if you can find it."

Expert Testimony.

There was not much to be gained from the witness on the stand, who seemed to have a wonderful faculty for holding his tongue, but the lawyer tried once more.

"You say your boat picked up the accused at 9 o'clock 'or thereabouts,'" he said. "It has been stated that he jumped overboard nearly an hour before that time. Tell me, Captain Sampson, how he appeared to you when you picked him up. If you had been required to give an opinion of him then, what would you have said?"

"Well, I'll tell ye honest," said the captain, when he had disposed of a portentous yawn. "I sh'd 've said he was one o' the wettest men, if not the wettest man, that ever I see!"

Explicit Directions.

"Dear mama," wrote a bride transplanted from a Southern family to the North, "please have Mammy Johanna send me her recipe for hot cakes."

Mammy Johanna had presided in the kitchen for thirty years. With much labor she wrote the recipe.

This was it: "Take as much flour as you need, 'cordin' to how many folks they is to eat; put in some salt—Miss May knows how much; put in all the rest of the ingradiums and be sure to have your griddle hot."

Hang Him.

Juggins—Who was it that said if he could make the songs of the people he wouldn't care who made the laws?

Muggins—Don't know. But if he's the chap who's making the songs of the people nowadays I'd just like to have the making of the laws a little while! That's all!

A Safe Horse!

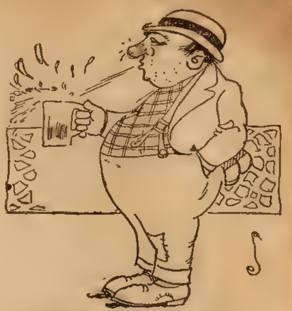
Purchaser—Now, remember, you warrant this horse fearless of steam.

Dealer (pocketing the money)—That's so. He ain't 'fraid of no steam. He don't scare at nawthin', 'cept bicycles an' flying leaves an' pieces o' paper an' such things.

Woman and Burglar.

Mrs. Winks (looking up from the paper)—A woman out West shot a burglar and killed him

Mr. Winks—Well! well! What was she aiming at?



Trades Illustrated—Glass blower.

The Acme of Bliss.

Cholly—My brother is in luck. He's got a place as floorwalkah in a dry-goods store. He is there sixteen hours a day.

Awther—I cawn't see the luck.

Cholly—You cawn't? Why, his pawnts can nevah bag at the knees.

Posting Him.

Stranger (at big hotel)—I notice you fee the waiters. Do you get better service?

Regular Guest—No.

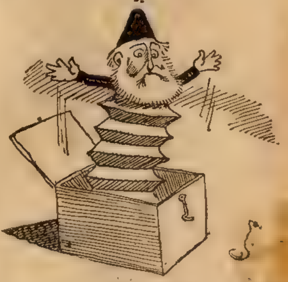
Stranger—Then why do you do it?

Regular Guest—So they won't spill the soup down my back.

Couldn't Hear It.

Hostess—Did you hear Wagner's "Lohengrin" performed in Paris?

Returned Tourist—No. I was in London at the time, and the wind was blowing the wrong way.

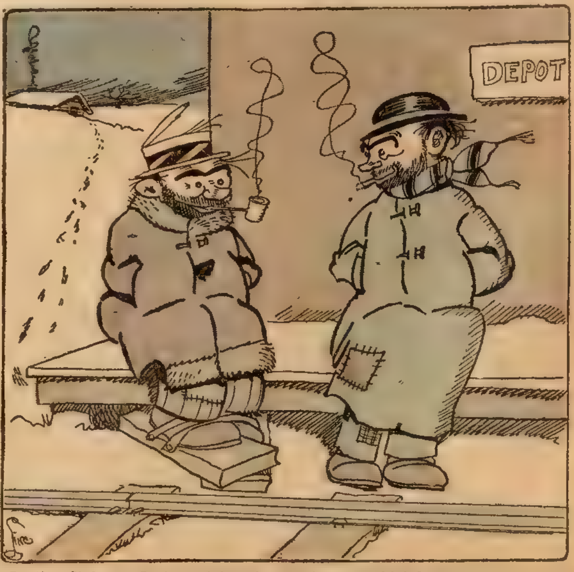


A spring opening.

Nothing Serious.

Sweltering Passenger (on railroad train)—This window sticks so I can't get it up.

Conductor—Yes. Wood is swollen a little by the rain. It'll be all right in a few days.



Drather Sitdown—Dat's a mighty short stub yer smokin', Dusty.
Dusty Dodgework—Yep! I knows it; dat's de way I allers like 'em; you don't hev ter pull de smoke so fur!

Facing Fearsome Things;

A STORY OF GHOSTS

By Lord Bulwer-Lytton

Begun in No. 20, May 20. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, or our agents, or by mail from the office of publication.

IT WAS a darkness shaping itself forth from the air in very undefined outline. I can not say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than to anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I can not say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I fancied I distinguished them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself: "What is fear? it is not fear!" I strove to rise—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming power opposed to my volition—that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond man's, which one may feel physically in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt morally. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength, as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of man.

And now, as this impression grew on me—now came, at last horror—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said: "This is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear I can not be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeded at last in stretching my hand toward the weapon on the table; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn; it was the same with the fire—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remembered that I broke forth with words like these: "I do not fear, my soul does not fear," and at the same time I found strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows—tore aside the curtain—flung open the shutters; my first though was—Light. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the moon; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially—but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone—except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover—an old mahogany round table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person—lean, wrinkled, small too—a woman's hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table; hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many colored—green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny Will-o-the-Wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawingroom below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape—a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life—ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned toward me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow—eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly—a man's shape—a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress (for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable—simulacra—phantasms); and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a blood-stain on the breast of the female; and the phantom male was leaning on its phantom sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up—they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of an aged woman. In her hand she held letters—the very letters over which I had seen the Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letter and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned—bloated, bleached—seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse, and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth, and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow—maligant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them; larvae so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other—forms like naught ever beheld by naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentred all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow—above all, from those strange serpent eyes—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in naught else around me, I was aware that there was a will, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvae grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly, as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him—no movement; I approached—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favorite—acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken. Had this been done in the dark?—must it not have been by a human hand as mine?—must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I can not tell. I can not do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since—that is, it will go in a strange erratic way for a few hours, and then come to a dead stop—it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Nor till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression—for which I could not account—that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena—if I may use the term—which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floors, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own house, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself, nor did I hear more of him for

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When a man or a woman grows fat and huge, flabby layers of this worthless flesh make them miserable, it is a certain sign that somewhere within the organism of that man or woman there is something radically wrong. The healthy man or woman digests all that is good in food and throws off in a natural manner all that is bad. This is what the digestive juices are made for. When these juices are weakened or too powerful they can not get the good things out of the nourishment we eat, and hence they turn into the blood that which makes fat. It is very simple to correct these juices in a fat person. This secret has been demonstrated in the famous Marmola Tablets which now have such a tremendous sale. They reduce fat at the rate of from 12 to 15 ounces a day. They correct the faulty juices and give to the body the very nutrition it needs. They remove fat in a natural manner, but they do it so quickly as to be almost beyond belief. You do not have to diet or exercise and you may eat what you will. These little tablets are the result of a demand on the part of the public for a form of the famous Marmola prescription that will permit a fat person to carry his fat reducer with him at all times, so that each meal will add no more fat to his body. Marmola Tablets are sold by every druggist, or you may write the Marmola Company, 1238 Farmer Bldg, Detroit, Mich., and a case will be sent you prepaid by mail. The price of Marmola Tablets is 75 cts everywhere.

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three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool to this effect:

"Honored Sir—I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think that I deserve it, unless—which Heaven forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself, and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails tomorrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy it is behind me. I humbly beg you, honored sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother's, at Walworth—John knows her address."

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My belief in my own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared, and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered: "I am but little acquainted with the woman's earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? for what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake—tell you what money you had in your pocket—nay, describe your very thoughts—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous rapport."

"But if a mesmerizer could so affect another living being can you suppose that a mesmerizer could also affect inanimate objects! move chairs—open and shut doors?"

"Or impress our senses with the belief in such effects—we never having been en rapport with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism and superior to it—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against nature—it would only be a rare power in nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such power might extend over the dead—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the Soul, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth to make itself apparent to our senses—is a very ancient though obsolete theory, upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural. Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus describes as not difficult, and which the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burned dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has as much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form. Hence, like the best attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be the soul; that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. These apparitions come for little or no object—they seldom speak when they do come; if they speak, they utter no ideas above those of an ordinary person on earth. American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications, in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrous dead—Shakespeare, Bacon—heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare, and Plato said and wrote when on earth. Nor, what is more noticeable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny—viz., nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiendlike shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodyless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those constitutions may produce chemic wonders—in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these may produce electric wonders. But the wonders differ from Natural Science in this—they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason; no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end. These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is maligant and destructive, I believe; some material force must have killed my dog; the same force might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog—had my intellect or my spirit given me no counterveiling resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog! that is fearful! indeed it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied forms a starting point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed—nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small back-yard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that—"

"You could cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operation."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the

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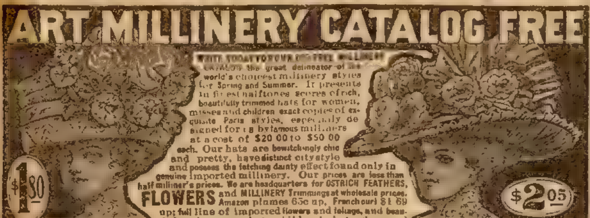
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cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

About ten days after I received a letter from Mr. J——, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters) she had married against the wish of her relations, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardianship of his only child—and in event of the child's death, the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterward—it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbors [illegible] it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape—crept out into the back-yard—tried to scale the wall—fallen back exhausted, and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder, and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterward. The widow was left in affluence; but reverses of various kinds had befallen her; a bank broke—an investment failed—she went into a small business and became insolvent—then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work—never long retaining a place, though nothing decided against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house—we went into the blind dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trap-door, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some moldering furniture—three chairs, an oak settle, a table—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank—costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court-dresses, a handsome court sword—in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold-lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves, and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stoppered. They contained colorless volatile essences, of the nature of which I shall only say that they were not poisonous—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber—also a lodestone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colors most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight.

It was a remarkable face—a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey: the width and flatness of frontal—the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw—the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald—and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power.

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1[illegible]. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Withinside the lid was engraved, "Marianna to thee—Be faithful in life and in death to——." Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of double murder within his own house—that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J——, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round, but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A peculiar but not strong nor displeasing odor came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterward discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odor, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room—a creeping, tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilled—the saucer was broken—the compass rolled to the end of the room—and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trap-door; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet; it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus: "On all that it can reach within these walls—sentient or inanimate, living or dead—as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burned the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He then had the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

The end.

* * *

Plea for Reasonableness.

"John! John! Get up"

"What's the matter, Mary? Is there a burglar in the house?"

"No. The maid and her big, ruffianly beau are still sitting in the kitchen and it's nearly 1 o'clock. I want you to go down there and tell him to go home."

"Now, wait, my dear. Let's not be hasty about these matters. We don't—"

"Hasty! Do you call it being hasty to let him stay here till after midnight? I want you to go down there and tell him to go home at once."

"There, you're being hasty again. I don't propose to tell him anything of the kind. How do we know that he has a home to go to? Let's be reasonable about these things."

THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS;

Or, Wild Adventures in Honduras

By LIEUTENANT JACK JUDSON

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CHAPTER XVI.

CONFRONTED at last by their hunters Tom Fallon and his companions were in desperate straits.

They were like lions brought to bay. On one side were the fierce natives of the near-by village and on the other Senor Goralo and his uniformed rabble.

The Spaniard of Esperanza would show no mercy and the young fugitives saw another term of slavery staring them in the face. To go back to the man-spider's web meant cruelty, not only in the town itself, but among the mines of the mountains.

For several minutes the two parties thus faced looked at one another in dead silence.

Marcelle's cry of "No surrender!" had been bravely echoed by Tom and Dick and Captain Jonas had supplemented it by cocking his rifle.

"Why not throw ourselves upon the mercy of the Meztizos?" suddenly exclaimed Tom.

"They have none," answered Marcelle.

"The natives have no love for the Spaniards," Dick put in as he gazed at the four motionless figures of the natives who in silence were gazing at the unexpected tableau which had presented itself.

"It seems to be the best move out of the trap," the sea captain said. "I've found lions merciful at times."

Not far away stood Senor Goralo surrounded by his minions, his face aglow with victory for were not the hunted ones almost in his power?

True he had lost Captain Joao, but he was still surrounded by twenty soldiers who would fight to the last under his banner. Twenty against four looked easy to him.

All at once the man of Esperanza drew a handkerchief from his bosom and fastened it on the edge of his sword With this flag of truce fluttering idly in the lazy breeze he advanced a few steps

The four drew up to receive his message whilst Maximilian crouched at the girl's feet, his fiery eyes fixed upon the man-spider.

"What is it?" asked Captain Jonas as the Spaniard neared them

"Who are you?" haughtily demanded Senor Goralo.

"I am Captain Jason Jonas of the Silver Moon."

"Ho! the captain of the lost ship?"

"Yes, and a Yankee of good lineage," proudly.

"I demand the surrender of those who are with you," returned the Spaniard "You can go free, Captain."

A smile played with the old man's lips

"Our fortunes are united," said he, returning the haughty look with one of fearlessness. "These young folks are my friends and we are not to be separated."

"Then I demand the surrender of all!"

"On the other hand, Senor," answered Captain Jonas, "we demand free journey to the capital"

Senor Goralo's face darkened

"I grant it not," he cried. "The three Americanos were in my service. They ran off like a lot of traitors and I have come to take them back"

The master of the Silver Moon shifted his quid and for a moment remained silent.

"It's twenty to four," pursued Senor Goralo. "You cannot doubt the outcome, Captain, and, by the way, I notice that you have enemies in your rear"

At this juncture Marcelle raised her hand and spake:

"Let me speak," said she in clear tones "There is more mercy in the eyes of the half-naked wretches behind us than in yours, Senor."

"I can sweep the whole lot from the face of the earth!"

"At terrible cost perhaps," flashed the heroic girl.

Without reply Senor Goralo took out his watch and laid it in the palm of his dark hand.

"I give you five minutes to decide," said he, wrathfully.

"That's long enough," answered Captain Jonas. "If I am not mistaken we won't need three."

The Spaniard remained where he was, but his men came nearer to him and drew up in solid ranks like a little army on the eve of battle.

"Fall back with your faces to the spider of Esperanza," he exclaimed. "We will trust the lions."

Tom and his companions silently obeyed.

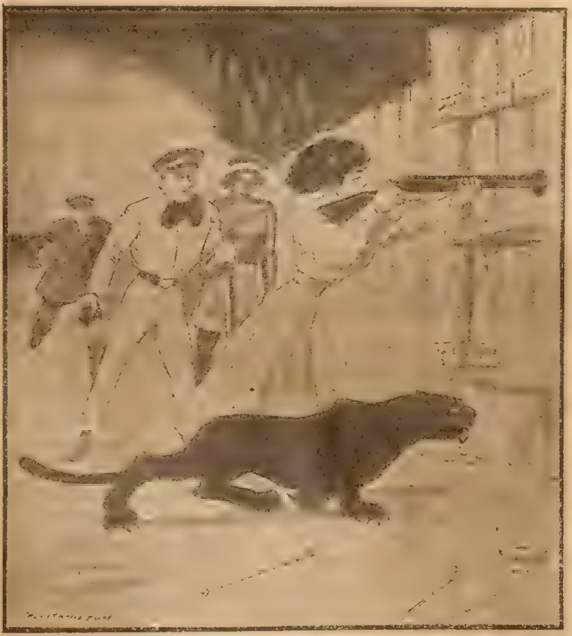
A few steps only intervened between them and the Meztizos. The four natives were still bronze statues in the jungle. Their arrows yet touched their bowstrings and their dark eyes were taking in the scene with not a promise of what they might do.

Captain Jonas who had traded in the tropics long enough to understand Spanish, which most of the uncivilized natives of Honduras can speak, advanced to within a few feet of the Meztizos and lifted his hand.

"Which of you is chief?" he asked, scanning the immobile forms.

A giant native smote his bare breast and answered that he was leader.

"We are Americanos," continued Captain Jonas. "We hate the native-hunting Spaniards. We have fled from the cruelties of Senor Goralo who has enslaved your race. We will fight with you against your oppressors. You know how Americanos can fight. We are not many, but we are powerful. Shall there be peace between us? It is for you to speak, most powerful chief of the forest"



The report instantly followed.

There was a twinkle in the old captain's eyes as he finished his harrangue. A somber silence fell upon his last words. All knew that he was playing a desperate card, but there was none other to play.

The leader of the Metzizos turned silently to his companions and spake in low tones. He waved his hand towards the landscape behind them. Then he suddenly drew a feather from his headdress and broke it in the presence of all.

"It means peace," ejaculated Marcelle, joyfully

A harsh word leaped from Senor Goralo's throat.

"To the lions, then," said the old captain and he waved his hand to the Spaniards

A minute later they were standing before the four natives.

"To the huts of the Spaniard haters?" exclaimed the chief. "We are brothers now, Americanos!"

The maddend Spaniard cut the air with his blade.

"We'll annihilate the wild men of the forest!" he cried. "We will leave all for the beaks of the vultures and their huts we will give to the flames.

"It's a game more than one can play at if I am not mistaken," sent back Captain Jonas with a bitter laugh.

It was not Senor Goralo's design that his prey should escape him so easily.

He had not endured the perils of the jungles to have Tom and his friends quit the net he had prepared for them.

The Meztizo chief spoke to his companions. The little band moved defiantly back.

"Now, Senor Captain," he said in whispers to Jonas. "To the huts of the Meztizos."

The walk was quickened into a run. A flash of firearms answered the command. The bullets of the Spaniards whistled over their heads.

Suddenly they came out upon a collection of poorly built huts surronded by a stockade.

"It's the place of the last stand?" cried Tom.

"Yes," answered Dick, "we must fight the battle here."

On rushed the little band, guarded by the natives. Senor Goralo could be heard urging on his men

A loud shout by the leader of the natives brought a dozen dark men from within the enclosure. They seemed to take in the situation at a glance.

The wooden gate of the stockade was thrown open.

"In, Senor Captain," said the Meztizo chief.

The leaguered four rushed on. Maximilian was the first to leap beyond the gate. The natives drew back at sight of the snarling animal.

A volley of balls rattled against the stockade and one Meztizo dropped to the ground to be dragged in by his comrades. The heavy gate shut with a harsh sound

"Safe!" exclaimed Dick with enthusiasm.

"By no means, Dick," was Tom's rejoinder. "It means a siege by the scoundrels outside."

Inside the stockade the fugitives were surrounded by as fierce a looking lot of wild men as their eyes had ever beheld They appeared ready to fall upon the newcomers and rend them after the manner of wild beasts.

The stalwart chief threw himself before the Americans and addressed the half-naked mob. His words were hot and full of fire. He pointed toward Senor Goralo and his men and told his people how they had suffered at the hands of the Spaniard. The crowd drew back, but a moment later pressed forward and shook the hands of the little band.

Outside the stockade, but at a respectful distance, fumed the man-spider and his soldiers

Pedrez Goralo had been baffled, but if he could work his will despite the new circumstances, victory would yet perch upon his banners

The long hot day drew wearily toward sunset. It was darkness the fugitives feared

Food was brought them and they satisfied their hunger. Tom and Dick began to inspect the fort in the forest. The stockade looked strong, but the soldiers were determined. What the night would bring forth no one knew.

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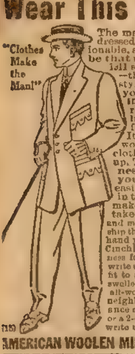
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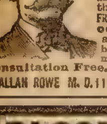

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Maximilian kept close to his mistress' side. He was carefully avoided by the natives, some of whom had already felt the terrible teeth of the jungle cougar.

At length the bird of the dusk, perched on a limb, sang his adieu to the day.

Marcelle went to a small opening in the stockade and looked out upon the fading lanscape. Not a living being was in sight, but this did not encourage her. The brave American girl knew that the forest still held the arch enemy who might be planning some stratagem that would yet cast them back in his hands.

Deeper and darker grew the shadows of the tropic night.

Suddenly a native advanced to the stockade and clambered to the top of the pointed stakes.

In another instant he dropped out of sight on the other side.

"What does all that mean?" demanded Captain Jonas of the stalwart chief.

"Oribo go spy," was the sententious answer.

"It's no compromise with the enemy, chief?"

"The Meztizo shook his head.

"That's good. If I thought it was there'd be a dead man where you stand!"

An hour passed. Tom and Dick thought it a whole night. At last something dropped to the ground from the top of the closely planted posts.

The spy had returned and was pointing toward the forest beyond.

Marcelle, after listening to his report, turned to Tom and Dick.

"They are weaving a new web for us out there," she said and turned to still the growls of Maximilian.

CHAPTER XVII.

It promised to be a night of adventures. The Meztizos were armed with bows, arrows and spears, the latter tipped with iron and underneath the barbs were the gaudy feathers of the gorgeous turkey-cock of the tropics.

For some time after the return of the spy nothing was heard from the foe outside. The very silence betokened evil. Tom Fallon and his companions knew that it might be an easy matter to fire the stockade which was as dry as powder and this was what the fugitives feared. The man-spider would hesitate at no mean stratagem to carry out his vengeance. He had resolved to triumph at any cost.

As for the natives, they seemed not to fear the enemy, but for all this the young castaways saw that they trembled at mention of Senor Goralo's name and they feared that, sooner than resist him, some traitor would open the gate and let the villians in.

To guard against this danger Marcelle stationed herself at the gate and Maximilian squatted at her side. The girl knew that the beast was held in such terror by the Meztizos that none would have the hardihood to unbar the entrance so long as he guarded it.

A figure stole to Marcelle's side. It was Dick.

"Treachery is afoot in the fort" he whispered when the girl had recognized him.

Marcelle glanced at Maximilian and inclined her head.

"I've caught two of the men whispering together," Dick went on. "They have stolen away from the chief and are now talking in one of the huts."

"They must be kept in sight if possible," answered Marcelle.

Dick glided off and returned to his old place.

The hut in which he had observed the suspected men was at the end of the little line of buildings within the stockade and quite near the stockade itself. He heard low whisperings on the inside, but could see no one.

Presently the poor door of the hut was slowly opened and a hideous face peeped out. Dick Chaffee drew back.

The coast seemed clear to the man in the doorway. His whole body crept out. With the movements of a forest beast he glided toward the stockade and halted at its foot. Dick was at his heels.

All at once the native sprang at the top of the posts with the agility of a monkey. His hands seized the pointed stakes and in a second he had vaulted from the ground.

That moment the boy castaway was upon him.

Dick seized the naked ankle and held on like grim death. In vain did the traitor kick and squirm though he uttered not a word. The man was stronger than the resolute Dick, but the boy did not loosen his grip.

"Tom?" Dick was forced to cry at last.

There was a responsive voice and the next instant Tom Fallon was at his side.

The native was pulled from his perch and thrown upon the ground.

Then for the first time the Meztizo opened his mouth. The noise he uttered was a screech, but the hut answered. A second figure bounded forward. Tom was seized and pulled away, but he instantly recovered and returned to the attack.

Something came across the open place like a bounding cannon ball.

It fell upon the first traitor with tooth and claw and the man made the welkin ring with his cries. Maximilian had come to the rescue. The second native with a screech of horror fled to the hut and the boys with difficulty pulled the cougar from his victim.

"There's one traitor who won't get out," grimly observed Dick as the torn man crawled off.

Marcelle had not been diverted from her sentryship by the incident. Captain Jonas came up with the chief and the Meztizo seized the crawler and, lifting him above his head, threw him by main force against the heavy posts at the foot of which he sank back quivering in every muscle.

"The night events are just beginning." Dick said. "Now we shall hear from our friends, the enemy on the outside."

The silence that ensued was soon rudely broken.

"For the last time I demand the surrender of the Americanos!" a voice said.

The little group on the inside looked at each other in dead silence.

"I'll answer the man-spider!" exclaimed Captain Jonas, striding toward the gate.

The old sailer mounted to the top of the stockade and his voice rang out in clarion tones.

"You might as well save your lungs'" he exclaimed. "If you want the Americanos, Senor Goralo, we are here to be taken if you can!"

He was answered by a full volley from the Hondurans and a ball carried the old captain's cap half way across the ground.

"Better a cap than a head," laughed Captain Jonas as he picked it up.

The chief got all his bowmen under arms, great fellows who looked like the fearless men they were in the dim light that prevailed.

"How far is it to the capital?" asked Captain Jonas.

"Many miles across the great forests," answered the Meztizo.

"Then we live or die here."

From the forest now there came no sound. The very stillness boded evil to the defenders of the jungle fort.

All at once a spark of fire leaped into being beyond the Meztizo village.

"A camp-fire!" exclaimed Tom and Dick.

The native chief shook his head.

"It is the fire-arrow, Americanos," he whispered.

Sure enough, a fiery object sped toward them and dropped into the enclosure.

Captain Jonas stamped it out with his heavy boot.

"The huts will burn like tinder," he said with a growl of displeasure.

The second arrow, fire-tipped, vaulted over the stockade and alighted on one of the filmsy roofs. Dick seemed to be there in a moment and his eager hands tore it out and flung it to the ground.

Marcelle who was looking through a narrow opening by the gate exclaimed that she saw the enemy.

"I can make out Senor Goralo and the soldier, who is shooting the fire-arrows," said she.

"Then put an end to the man-spider of Esperanza!" Tom exclaimed.

"No," answered the girl in low tones, "I have reserved him for the thing he hates most, the cougar."

However, she leveled her rifle and, thrusting it forward, dropped her cheek to the stock. The report instantly followed and a cry came back on the little breeze.

"One!" said Tom.

"What if the fiends should rush the fort?" asked Dick.

"It won't hold out long," Captain Jonas replied grimly. "Half a dozen men at the gate would soon send it inward."

Another arrow came, but struck the ground doing no damage. Then darkness swooped down upon the scene.

The Meztizo chief scrambled to the top of the stockade and vanished.

The watchers had hardly ceased to wonder what his disappearance meant when he dropped among them.

Without a word he marshaled his men at the gate.

"They are coming," he said in Spanish, with a look at the old sea captain.

A mingled yell from many throats was flung against the sky and then something heavy struck the gate.

Marcelle was almost thrown off her feet.

"Once more, my brave fellows!" rang out the voice of Senor Goralo. "A thousand pesos to each man if we get inside!"

The Meztizos under their chieftain's eye leveled their spears and stood like Spartans waiting for the second assault.

The great chief sent a defiant cry at

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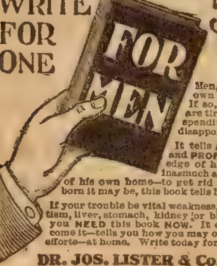

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the foe and planted himself more firmly where he stood.

The crisis had come.

There was but one tree whose branches overlapped the top of the stockade.

Until that moment it had not been observed by the young castaways, but Dick, casting his eyes upward, recoiled with a cry and pointed toward the overhanging bough.

A great, sinuous object was hanging from the limb.

"The boa!" shouted Dick Chaffee.

The glittering eyes and enormous folds of the terror of the Honduran jungles were enough to drive courage from the stoutest hearts.

The hideous head was wriggling within a few inches of the startled group.

A dozen spears were instantly aimed at the monster, but there was something quicker than the pointed barbs. A four-footed thing like an overgrown cat leaped upward from the ground. Its eyes seemed to send forth sparks of fire, sharp teeth were buried in the neck of the boa, and Maximilian, the cougar, was hanging to his prey with all the savage vengeance of the jungles.

He did not relinquish his hold till the head of the snake was almost severed and as he dropped to the ground with dripping jaws a thousand furies seemed to launch themselves against the gate.

This was more than the structure could stand. It gave way before the assault and fell in, shattered. Marcelle called out sharply to the tawny cat. There was an answering cry and Maximilian sent his huge body straight into the midst of the besiegers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

There was a cry of horror from more than one throat as the ferocious animal seemed to vanish.

The soldiers recoiled and the defenders of the jungle fort attempted to put up the fallen gate, though not till the natives had hurled a dozen spears and Tom and Dick had fired into the faces of the foe.

It took strong hands to force the broken gate back, and as it was pushed forward Maximilian sprang into the midst of his friends.

It was evident that the beast had done his work, and as he purred against Marcelle she reached downward and stroked his sleek skin.

"Max has found his real prey," she said with a smile as she looked up. "He has settled with Senor Goralo."

"Do you think so?" asked Dick.

"His eyes tell me this," was the answer. "We have seen the last of the man-spider of Honduras."

The gate was repaired as well as possible and the defenders of the village waited for another attack.

None came.

Slowly the long night wore away. Now and then a fiery arrow sped through the gloom, but, for the most part, it overshot its mark and even when one fell within the enclosure it was soon extinguished by the women who were industrious in helping their husbands.

At length the chief vaulted once more over the stockade and vanished.

He was not long absent when his dark body dropped again beside the anxious ones.

He stooped and ventured to stroke Maximilian who showed his teeth till a look from Marcelle bade him desist.

"The big cat!" laughed the Meztizo. "Him find the man in white.."

"I told you so!" exclaimed the girl with a glance at Tom and Dick.

"Senor Goralo hunt no more," resumed the chief with a shake of his head. "The big cat find him."

Out in the forest around a little fire which was screened from those in the fort stood a group of Honduran soldiers. They looked down upon the form of a man stretched on the ground and covered with a blanket.

No one ventured a word of praise for the man-monster of Esperanza who had been torn and mauled by Maximilian till life was extinct. He had met his fate at the hands of the beast he dreaded most and the cougar had avenged more than one act of cruelty.

The new day came without a renewal of the attack. The birds of morning came out and filled the forest with song, the monkeys sprang from limb to limb and the silver webs of the tropic spiders glistened everywhere.

Not a single human foe was in sight. Captain Jonas resolved to take a little scout. The gate was opened and he slipped away. Those who watched him saw him vanish among the gorgeous shrubbery.

Presently there came to all ears a cry that seemed to make the jungle ring. The old sea captain was seen running forward with all his might. He had lost his cap and there was no sign of a weapon in his hands.

The young fugitives crowded to the gate and stared breathless at the exciting scene.

"He's chased by no one," cried Tom. "The old captain has lost his head."

"And his rifle, too," answered Dick. "What is the old fellow running from?"

On came the excited man. He was waving his hands as if appealing to the spectators to open the gate. Perhaps he had run afoul of the Spaniard's army.

"The grass is rustling behind him!" shouted Dick after a minute's observation.

"Bushmaster!" said the native chief.

The deadly serpent was now partly visible. It was chasing the valorous captain who was exerting every energy in the race for life. If it had not been for the old sea-dog's peril the whole scene would have been laughable.

In through the gate dashed Captain Jonas to fall on his face ten feet beyond it.

"Close the gate!" he shouted when he caught his breath. "It's bigger than a tree!"

Tom put on an expression of innocence.

"What is it, Captain?" he asked.

"The boa! the boa!" was the response. "I acutally stepped on the monster! no, I took it for a fallen tree and sat down on the horrid thing."

Captain Jonas was on his feet, mopping his face while he gasped out the story of his adventure.

"Is that your boa out younder?" queried Marcelle, pointing into the forest.

The master of the Silver Moon dragged himself forward.

A few yards from the gate, in many a dark coil, lay the bushmaster from which he had fled with such precipitation. Captain Jonas rubbed his eyes and frowned.

"Captain," smiled Dick, with a furtive look at his friends, "when we get back to the States I am going to enter you in the first Marathon race that comes up."

By slow degrees a smile gathered at the mouth of the old salt.

"Did I really show speed, Dick?" he exclaimed.

Lightning is slow compared to the time you made," was the retort.

"Well, who wouldn't run from that thing yonder?"

Marcelle now opened the gate a little wider and let Maximilian out.

The tawny cat moved forward and soon spied the coiled death among the leaves. He move around it, getting nearer all the while, and all at once his body shot through the air and landed upon the bushmaster's back.

The snake had now an enemy worthy of his steel and though he contorted his body so as to sink his fangs into the beast, he was baffled at every turn and presently Maximilian came loping back.

It was soon found that the soldiers were gone. The body of their merciless leader had been dragged away and the trail led toward Esperanza.

The day was well advanced before the fugitives filed out of the jungle village headed for the capital. The Meztizos insisted upon guarding them some distance, and when they parted company the last peril had been passed.

It turned out to be a long trail

All at once from the summit of a hill Tom descried a city of many odd looking roofs and plenty of trees and shouted to his friends as he waved his hat joyfully over his head.

"Tegucigalpa!" he cried.

Far below them lay the capital of Honduras, and far behind the dangers through which they had passed.

The little party was seen as it descended the hilly ground and a number of men came forward.

The fugitives were escorted through the streets of the capital and entered the president's palace.

"Welcome, Americanos!" said a fine looking man who came forward with outstretched hands. It was President Sierra.

Captain Jonas, old salt that he was and supposed to fear nothing, plumped into a chair at a strange sound and turned pale.

"It's another snake, Tom!" he exclaimed as the boy castaway touched his arm. "If I ever come down into this horrid country again I hope I may be whipped to death."

At that moment the noise was repeated and the valiant Captain mounted a chair. A large red-nosed ape loped from a lot of palms and chattered in the old man's face.

Some time elasped before Captain Jonas could be subdued and even then he looked white.

A few weeks later a little party walked down the gang-plank of a steamer and found it surrounded by a lot of curious people. All eyes were fixed upon the huge brute which trotted at Marcelle's side and Maximilian returned the compliment by grinning mischieviously.

Home at last!

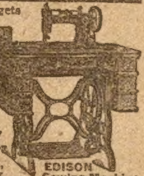
Before they left Tegucigalpa President Sierra had offered a large sum for Maximilian, but Marcelle had refused, saying that in all the world there was not another defender like her tawny pet.

Captain Jonas was given command of a new trader by Tom's uncle, but he had it inserted in the contract that he was not to trade along the Honduran coast where he said nothing lived but bushmasters and jaguars.

President Sierra took possession of Senor Goralo's realm, and one day, Tom, Dick and Marcelle were surprised to learn that in the Bank of Tegucigalpa the sum of fifty thousand pesos each had been placed to their credit, and the humane Spaniard said in his letter that he hoped the sums would, in a measure, recompense them for the cruelty they had endured while in the web of Senor Goralo.

Captain Jonas came in for a neat sum from the same source, and President Sierra accompanied his letter by a beautiful parrot, which he remarked might please the doughty captain more than a bushmaster.

(Continued on page nineteen.)



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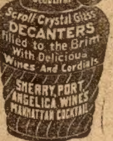
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Trance or Death.

(Continued from Page Nine.)

So we stepped out of the beautiful rooms and ten minutes later were sitting in the brilliant audience-room of the opera house. Throughout the performance he maintained a fine manner; it seemed impossible to conceive of him being else than most tenderly courteous. He passed some modest, but, I thought, very fitting criticisms upon the music. As we were passing out at the close he bowed to a number of finely dressed people, among them some strikingly handsome creole women. After eating an ice in a restaurant, we walked about the gleaming streets for a half hour, looking in at gilded saloons and gambling houses. Whatever his usual habits might have been, in my presence he seemed inclined to no grosser dissipation than smoking his own fragrant cigars, while his language was always chaste and polite.

"When this wearies you, Mr. Stantree, you must not scruple to so express yourself," he said at length.

"Oh, I find it, in a way, very attractive and diverting," I replied. "I like the glitter of glass and artificial light, and the stir and movement. Of course it is not natural in any respect, but I have always found the night scenes in a great city interesting."

"Yes, I believe the weaker side of humanity attracts the student of phases more readily than the stronger and more perfect exposure of the normal. By the way, have you ever been in a hashish-house?"

I glance at his face. "You must excuse my verdancy, Mr. Shirlaw, but I fear you will have to interpret the term," I said. "You may remember that I intimated once before that I am a rustic in many ways."

"You have simply studied the better side of things," he said, with a pleasing kind of gravity. "I congratulate you. But hashish-house—it is a place especially fitted up for the smoking of narcotic hemp."

"Oh! No, I have never visited such a place."

"It is, in a manner, intensely interesting, I think. There are of course many dens where the weak indulge in opium smoking, but these are only reeking, disgusting places. The building I have in mind is near here and is quite the finest of its sort, I fancy, in the country. All the surroundings are arranged to intensify the captivating effects of the drug. I think, if you are at all curious for odd, beautiful things, you would enjoy looking at it."

"It is not a dangerous place?"

He smiled. "Only to those who contract the habit of visiting there; only the best class of ladies and gentlemen are admitted."

"I think I should like to see it."

He led the way down the glowing street, turned to the left through a dim quiet avenue, and presently we entered a flagged, crevice-like alley, across the inner end of which loomed a large dark building. It was absolutely dark, save for a crimson star of light above the door. I had taken a little ivory-handled pistol, a gift from a student friend in the North, from my hand-bag before starting for Shirlaw's rooms in the evening. I now felt a good deal of satisfaction that this small weapon was in my pocket, and I put my hand upon it as I followed the stranger into the gloom. However, he was quite as solicitous and polite as ever. When we were within the portico he pulled three times at what was evidently a bell, though I could hear no sound. After a pause he pulled twice, then, pausing again, pulled once. With that there fell a jingling of silvery chains, the sliding of bolts, the turning of a key in a lock, and we stepped through the doorway into darkness. We stood there a moment while my companion whispered to some invisible person, then a door in front of us swung open noiselessly, and we stepped into a wonderful reception hall.

A lamp of grotesque shape depended from the ceiling, filtering a soft violet light through doubly crenated disks of violet fabric arranged about it. The walls were hung with plaits and festoons of glittering stuffs, into the folds of which the soft glow seemed to flow and sleep in tiny prismatic pools. The ceiling was a wrinkled sheet of greenish, pearly satin, looped at the corners with gold cord ending in great tinsel tassels. Along the wall at one side stood several vases, huge, marvelously fine, and filled with blooming plants. Out of this room climbed a small spiral stair of exquisite wrought iron work, and all up and down the metal tendrils of the balustrade ran green vines, thick with flowers. A heavy perfume hung in the place, slightly sickening, and wholly unlike anything I had ever smelled.

As we stood there a handsome mulatto, garbed like a Persian, came out of a door and, taking our hats and canes, led us up the beautiful stair. This latter ushered us into a little room, which was round and seemed to twist upward out of sight like the interior of an inverted pink-lined shell. Out of this golden grotto three doors opened. The servant brushed back the heavy satin drapery from one upon the right, and we entered a room all sides of which were curtains of indescribably rich shimmering cloth. A depending lamp of Mooresque pattern threw a greenish, faintly weird glow over the place, lighting up the fabrics of two downy, voluptuous couches, strewn with silken pillows, and falling upon a carpet that was like something woven by fairies.

The servant silently extended his hand and Shirlaw placed a gold piece in it. The man then disappeared, and we sat down upon a luxurious divan. I looked about me with keenest interest, charmed by the Oriental beauty of the place. A tender, lulling music seemed everywhere, welling out of the very furnishings, it seemed, in soft, bewitching cadences.

"This is a private room," said Shirlaw quietly. "There are a number of them, all dissimilar in treatment. When we have tasted the hemp, I will show you the public room. I think it rather finer than the rest."

CHAPTER XXI.

My exquisite friend had scarcely done speaking when the mulatto in the Persian dress entered. He bore a tray upon which were two small pipes, a small lamp of silver filigree work, and a bronze cup in which were dry green filaments of a shrub. Upon the tray, also, was a curious little box of lozenges. The servant placed these upon a little, brass-legged onyx-topped table and took his leave.

"I did not have these brought expecting you to indulge," said Shirlaw, "but that you might see and taste them if you liked. This green stuff in the bronze cup is the dried tops and leaves of the hemp plant. That is for smoking. These lozenges in the box are taken internally. In India they are called majoon. They consist, I am told, of the resin of hemp, crushed datura seeds, henbane, butter and honey. The drunkenness produced by swallowing these and smoking the hemp induces an indescribable pleasure of the nerves and dreams that are beyond the capacity of language to picture."

I looked at him a moment. "And you have experienced them?" I queried.

"Once. Only once. The experience is worth the candle, I assure you, but as a habit it is far too depleting and destructive. I prefer a clear brain and rational pleasures. If you would care to taste the hemp I will light one of the pipes; one has to mix a bit of tobacco with it else it won't burn."

I considered a moment. "No; I am obliged to you, but I think I should be satisfied with the description of your own pleasures. The stuff doesn't look tempting, besides, the smell from the smokers in the other rooms is quite enough for me."

He smiled affably. "You are a discreet person. Smoking hemp is much like taking a beautiful snake into the bosom; it may sting one. One may never be able to get away from the fascinating memory a first experience leaves. That is the danger of it. Continued as a habit, it ends, of course, in insanity and death. No, I shall not attempt a description of my sensations and dreams. It would fill a volume." He lay back among the silken pillows, pulling slowly at his cigar, his eyes dwelling dreamily upon the soft flare of the lamp, as he listened to the tender, yearning strains of the music.

Presently my companion led me into a magnificent room, where some twenty persons were assembled, all under the influence of the drug.

"Notice that one closely," whispered my companion. "I will tell you of him presently."

For a moment I followed the man indicated with my eye. He was almost a giant in stature, with strong superbly shaped head, black hair and a great flowing beard upon his mighty breast. Once he had surely been as Hercules, now he was deadly pale, sunken cheeked, hollowed eyed, and his clothing hung loose and flapping upon his great frame. The sight was unutterably pitiable.

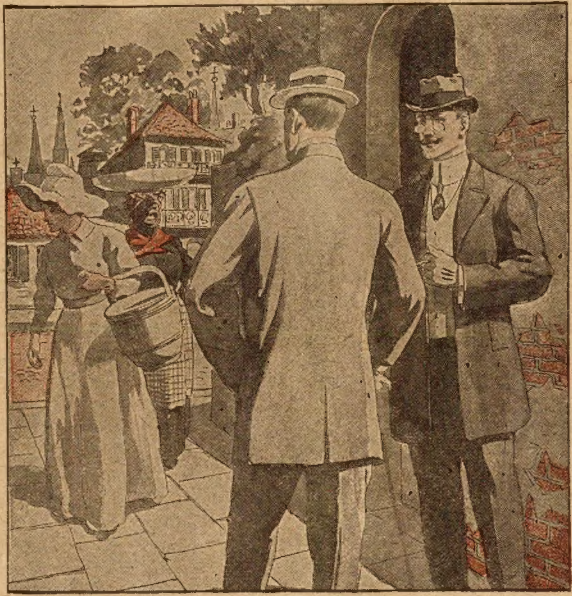
As he walked to and fro he suddenly gave a great cry, and began tearing some fancied thing in pieces with his hands. At that an attendant came out from an unseen door and led him away. None of the hashish smokers apparently noticed the cry or the scene. They were busy with their dreams.

"Let us go," I said. "I have had enough of this!"

Shirlaw bowed and smiled, and we passed back through the curtained room, down the spiral stair, and at length stepped from the portico. I took a long breath of the cool night breeze.

"My God, how sweet this is!" I exclaimed.

"The air? Yes, it does taste rather nice after inhaling the fumes of burning hemp, tinctured with perfumes so rich as those!"



"It isn't bad, Mr. Stantree, is it?

"Well, Mr. Shirlaw, if it is permissible to ask and the fact is within your knowledge, will you tell me who keeps this paradise of fools?" I asked.

The street, though quite empty of people, was brightly lighted where we walked, and he turned his eyes upon my face as if to carefully note the effect of his answer.

"The building and furnishings are owned by Dr. Stanwood," he said. "A certain creole conducts it for him."

I stopped stone-still and stared at him. "Dr. Julian Stanwood?" I gasped.

"The same. You scarcely expected it?"

I stared at him in horror a moment longer, then walked onward. The ability to speak seemed to have deserted me. I, then, with Marguerite, was the owner of this gorgeous death-trap! What other legacy of evil had fallen to us beside this?

"The doctor is a strange character," I heard Shirlaw saying. "I think I never knew any one so fond of the fantastically beautiful as he. For him the beauty of the place justified its existence, I fancy."

I grunted something, I know not what. All that my father had seemed to me was pouring through my mind. If he had been morally capable of building and deriving revenue from such a place, and I felt instinctively that the whole structure had grown under his eye, what enormity was there which might not reasonably be attributed to him? Alas, my poor mother!

"By the way, I had all but forgotten the large man whom we saw in the hashish-house," said Shirlaw. "His is an interesting case."

"Yes," I muttered.

"His name is Breslau. It has been whispered to me that he was formerly

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EXPRESS CHARGES PREPAID.

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To all knowing sufferers of rheumatism, whether muscular, or of the joints, sciatica, lumbagos, backache, pains in the kidneys or neuralgia pains, to write to her for a home treatment which has repeatedly cured all of these tortures. She feels it her duty to send it to all sufferers FREE. You cure yourself at home as thousands will testify—no change of climate being necessary. This simple discovery banishes uric acid from the blood, loosens the stiffened joints, purifies the blood, and brightens the eyes, giving elasticity and tone to the whole system. If the above interests you, for proof address Mrs. M. Summers, Box 457, South Bend, Ind.

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Dr. Stanwood's partner in the fine place we have seen, and in other ventures. However, Breslau was presently stung of his own serpent, you see, and fell, ruined every way. This place and most of his accumulations passed to Stanwood; I do not know how, and I fancy it doesn't matter as to means in such a case. The man became incapable; of course, some one was bound to absorb his possessions. He has free access to the hashish-house and its pleasures. Ultimately he will die there or in an asylum, I suppose. It is a pitiful case."

Breslau! Was this the wonderful person of whom my father had written? Every drop of blood in me chilled with apprehension. "He seemed a man who once might have been unusually endowed," I said, unsteadily.

Shirlaw seemed to hesitate a moment. "Yes," he said finally, "he was one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. The other day, when on the steamer, you spoke of the feats performed by the Yogi of India. I then thought of Breslau. I think he was the only man I ever feared—I speak of him in the past tense, for he is as one dead. I fancied at one time that he could take human life by the simple weapon of his intellect."

This extraordinary story will be continued in the next issue of the Ledger. A lot of strange and exciting things happen. Read it. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you if you send in a year's subscription. It only costs $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

⁂

Had to Take It.

George Barr McCutcheon was waiting for a train in Chicago and as he passed through the station he saw one of his latest best sellers displayed on the newstand counter. He picked it up, wrote his name on the fly leaf and handed it to the boy behind the counter. He was moving away when the boy called excitedly:

"Hey, mister, come back here. You've got to buy this book 'cause you've spoiled it by writing your name in it."

"Yes, but did you see the name?" the author asked.

"That don't make no difference," the lad insisted, "nobody'll want to buy it now."

And hearing his train called, Mr. McCutcheon was forced to pay real money for one of his own books.

⁂

FREE ASTHMA CURE.

D. J. Lane, a chemist at 115 Lane Building, St. Marys' Kansas, manufactures a remedy for Asthma in which he has so much confidence that he sends a $1 bottle by express to anyone who will write for it. His offer is that he is to be paid for it if it cures, and the one taking the treatment is to be the judge.

⁂

Another Inducement.

A woman came to the advertisement office of a local newspaper to insert a plea for a cook.

"It's three lines, isn't it?" she asked, having some experience in advertising for domestics.

"No," said the clerk, counting carefully. "It's over three lines. We'll have to charge you for four. But you put in four more words if you wish."

The seeker after "help" paused a moment in deep thought. "Four more words," she repeated, "four more words? O, I have it. Put in 'policeman stationed opposite corner.'"

⁂

LADIES, PRESERVE YOUR YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE.

Madame Mignette's Beauty Cream and Skin Food removes every defect, spot, freckle, pimple, blemish or wrinkle, leaving the skin soft, clear and smooth. It is perfectly harmless and will not injure the most delicate skin. It preserves and brings back the youthful glow to the face and ruddiness to the cheeks, preserving it in this condition until extreme old age. This preparation has been used for years and hundreds are now using it and are more than delighted with the results. Send us ten (10) cents for formula which you can have filled at any drug store at a very small cost. Do not delay, but write at once. Box 491, Blairsville, Pa.

⁂

Getting Even.

"You know that fellow, Jim McGroarty, the lad that's a'ways comin- up an' thumpin' ye on the chest an' yellin', 'How are ye?'"

"I know him."

"I'll bet he's smashed twenty cigars for me—some o' thim clear Havannys—but I'll get even with him now."

"How will ye do it?"

"I'll tell ye. Jim always hits me over the vest pocket where I carry me cigars. There's no cigar in me vest pocket this mornin'. Instead of it there's a stick of dynamite, d'ye mind!"

⁂

TO WOMEN WHO DREAD MOTHERHOOD!

Information How They May Give Birth to Happy, Healthy Children Absolutely Without Pain—Sent Free.

No woman need any longer dread the pains of child-birth, or remain childless. Dr. J. H. Dye has devoted his life to relieving the sorrows of women. He has proved that all pain at child-birth may be entirely banished, and he will gladly tell you how it may be done absolutely free of charge. Send your name and address to Dr. J. H. Dye, 200 Lewis Block, Buffalo, N. Y., and he will send you, postpaid, his wonderful book which tells how to give birth to happy, healthy children, absolutely without pain; also how to cure sterility. Do not delay but write today.

The Young Castaways.

(Continued from page seventeen.)

Maximilian found a home with his young mistress, and today he is one of the sights of the great city, and when Tom and Dick visit Marcelle to talk over their thrilling adventures in the land of the man-spider, the big cat stretches his beautiful length on the carpet and playfully shows his teeth.

Next week the Ledger will contain a new and splendid story by St. George Rathborne, called "The House-Boat Boys, or Floating Down to Dixie." It is an account of the adventures of two boys who floated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in a house-boat. It will keep you interested. Read it sure.

The end.

⁂

Joke on Hamill.

Representative Hamill of New Jersey is being kept busy explaining about a bill which was introduced in the House, and bears his name as its author.

This bill provides for nothing less than "a national highway along or near the thirty-fifth parallel of north latitude, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean."

The right of way for the highway is to be a mile wide, from ocean to ocean. Some expert has figured that the cost would be a billion dollars, more or less.

There is to be as part of the project a national automobile highway, 1,430 feet wide, "two macadam-surfaced roads, each twenty feet wide, each road to have two steel tracks for electric cars, two tracks to be used for freights; two macadam-surfaced roads, each twenty feet wide, each road to have a steel-place track for fast automobiles; two macadam roads, each twenty feet wide, each road to have two cement ways for automobiles going twenty-five miles or less an hour; two macadam roads, each twenty feet wide, each road to have eight cement paths for bicycles, motor cycles, tricycles and other cycles; one cement way, ten feet wide, for the use of roller skaters. And in addition there are to be zones for water, gas, sewer and oil pipes, and the like; zones for factories and public buildings, park areas and shade-tree zones."

It is clear that it is proposed to make the historic Appian Way look like 30 cents in comparison.

What is troubling Hamill, however, is that he didn't introduce the bill. Somebody put it in the "hopper" in the house and signed his name to it. It has been printed, and contains about twenty-seven pages in type. Hamill fears he can't run for office very swiftly next time on an economy platform if his enemies get hold of this bill and circulate it through his district.

⁂

How to Clean House.

Housecleaning time is dreaded justly by a great many people, but the thoughtful husband may get it through with in short order. Washing windows, for instance, is always gone about in such an awkward way, the windows being washed in statu quo, so to speak. A simpler way is to take the windows out and send them to the laundry.

Dusting the pictures is also usually attended with much hard work. A quick and simple plan is to take hold of the frame firmly and swing the picture back and forth, hitting it sharply against the wall each time. This dislodges the dust, which falls to the floor and may easily be swept up.

If you have no vacuum cleaner, you may improvise one with an old bicycle pump by attaching a funnel to the nozzle. Then work the pump backward, so that, instead of forcing the air out, it will be drawn in. The rugs may soon be cleaned in this way.

Washing the woodwork is another futile procedure. Simply get a few gallons of paint and paint over the grime on the woodwork.

To repolish the hardwood floors, take your wife's manicure buffer and sit down in a comfortable position and go to work. You wil be surprised at what a pleasant way this will be to while away the evenings.—Judge.

⁂

Hard to Please.

Early in the season a man applied at a farmhouse for board, but the farmer slowly shook his head. "I'd be glad to keep you," he said, "but city people are too hard to please."

"I am not at all exacting," the applicant replied. "You will find no difficulty in pleasing me."

"That's what the last man who came along here said, but it wasn't so. Fact is, nothing pleased him. First he complained about sleeping in a bed with a hired man, and when we give him a bed to himself in a room with four of the children he was still dissatisfied.

"Then he didn't like to use the towel we all used and he wanted a wash basin in his room. Nothing suited him at all. I don't know whether you would be so hard to please or not."

"Well," said the city man, "perhaps I had better not chance it."

A Baby in the House

No joy or pleasure on this earth quite equals that which comes into the home when baby arrives. Who can describe the happiness of man and woman, joined in wedlock, as they look upon the delicate mite that is blood of their blood and flesh of their flesh? And who can depict the hopelessness and dejection that hover about the home where the wife is incapable of becoming a mother? Barrenness proceeds from some derangement of the distinctly feminine organs. Many of the common ailments known as "female troubles" cause it.

Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription overcomes barrenness by stamping out diseases of women, and by healing and curing ulceration. It tones up the system and restores strength.

It makes the baby's coming almost painless, and gives wonderful recuperative power to the patient. By making the mother strong and cheerful, it makes the little one healthy, vigorous and good natured.

Insist upon the medicine dealer giving you Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription when you ask for it. Substitutes are often dangerous.

For 21 one-cent stamps to cover cost of mailing *only*, you can get a *free* copy of that celebrated doctor book, newly revised, up-to-date edition—the Common Sense Medical Adviser, 1008 pages, copiously illustrated with wood-cuts and colored plates. Cloth-bound, 31 stamps. Address Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y.

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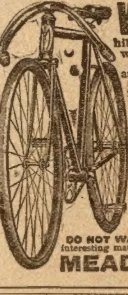

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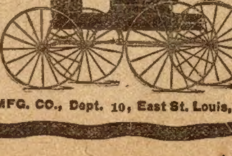

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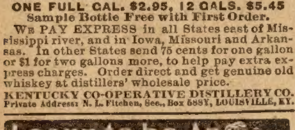
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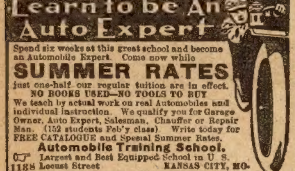
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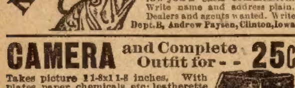
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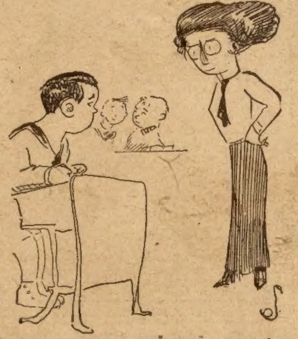
EXTRAORDINARY.

The other day, upon the street, my own, and no one else's eye,
Did see a lilac colored horse, as sure as jam and custard pie!

And by him ran upon his feet a puppy colored like the rose—
As sure as Ecuador and France; as sure as poetry and prose!

And you, indeed, may see, yourself, this most extraordinary sight,
For lilacs, child, and roses, too, are very often colored white!

❧



Teacher—Henry, if I have forty bananas and sell ten and lose six how many have I left?

New Boys—'Scuse me, but I allers do my sums in oranges!

❧

A Candy Boat.

One rainy day in the spring when Herbert and his sister Martha were tired of staying in the house and "fidgety" because they had nothing to do, their mother said to them: "Well children, how would you like to go down in the kitchen and make some molasses candy?"

"We surely would!" cried the children, clapping their hands, and down the kitchen stairs they clattered and burst in upon the cook, crying: "Mother says we can make some molasses candy!"

So the cook got out the molasses and sugar and butter and told the children how to mix them together, and the candy was soon boiling on the stove. When it was done and had grown cool enough for them to touch it, the children rubbed butter all over their hands to prevent the molasses from sticking and pulled and pulled it till it turned from a dull brown to a bright yellow.

After they had done this for quite a while, Herbert had a new idea.

"Let's make it into fancy shapes," he said. So Herbert made a candy slipper and Martha made a candy cup and saucer, and then Herbert made a candy canoe. When it was finished he decorated it with swirls and quirls of molasses so that it was beautiful to behold. Then he set it on the window sill to cool and went back to make some more lovely candy things. By the time they had pulled all the candy the canoe had hardened. It was so pretty that Herbert could not bear to eat it.

"I wonder if it wouldn't float like a real boat," he said.

"Let's take it down to the brook and try," said Martha, for by this time the rain had stopped and the sky was blue again.

Down they ran to the brook, where they set their tiny craft afloat. It looked so pretty bobbing up and down on the ripples that the children clapped their hands with glee.

"I wish we were small enough to go for a sail in it," cried Martha.

No sooner had she said the word than she heard an elfin chuckle behind her. She turned and saw a queer little man dressed in green perched on the branch of a hemlock.

"You have your wish!" he cried. "Jump in as fast as you can."

So the children clambered into the boat, which immediately began floating down the stream.

Since they had suddenly grown so small the brook seemed to Herbert and Marth to be like a wide river and the bushes at its edge towered above them like mountains. The familiar scenes seemed strange and new to the children and they enjoyed it immensely. But in the midst of their fun they noticed that their boat was getting soft. It was only made of candy, they remembered, and the water was melting it.

They had no sooner discovered this peril than a still greater one presented itself. Close at hand they heard the roar of a waterfall.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Martha. "We shall go over the falls!"

But they did not, for as they came near the leap of the water, out from the bushes blundered a little fox terrier, who sprang into the creek, caught their boat in his mouth and paddled back to shore. As soon as they touched land Herbert and Martha regained their natural size, greatly to the astonishment of the fox terrier, and they were so grateful to him for rescuing them that they gave him the whole of the candy boat to eat and promised him a lump of sugar every time he should come to the house.

❧

Some Drummers.

In 1715, when the boy who afterward became Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, was 3 years of age, his father was delighted to come upon him strutting about and beating a drum. The wonderful feat was much talked about and the result was that a great painter was sent for. The portrait of the famous little drummer still hangs on the wall in Charlottenburg. That the young Frederick should have loved to drum was welcomed by his fond father as a sign of his military genius. It turned out to be so in the case of Frederick the Great, but it cannot be used by other parents as a sign that their young Willies or Tommies will be great generals some day because they like to pound their drums. If this were so all little boys would be great generals, for all little boys at some period of their youth have been guilty of drumming, as one slangy little girl has it—"to beat the band."

Drums have always been made by native races, who use them to help drive away evil spirits, to terrify their foes, to make their men fight better and to summon friends together. They are of all sizes, sorts and shapes. In China drums are made of baked clay, bowl-shaped, with a skin stretched across the top. A drum from Central America is cone-shaped, over four feet in height, and is hollowed out of a solid block of wood. An Ashantee drum is shaped like a bottle—a large bottle, which is the head of the drum. A Mandingo drum resembles a ten-pin upside down, and a Friendly Island drum, between four and five feet high, is like a hollowed post with a head of leather not more than six inches across.

❧

FRIENDS.

We are such friends, my little girl and I,
That, though her summers number scarcely nine,
I need none other, as I go my ways,
With her small fingers closely clasping mine.

A little world we two make of our own,
And people it with all things fair and sweet;
The stars that twinkle overhead at night,
Drop down at dawn in daisies at our feet.

My smiles are hers; my tears are all my own;
I keep my sighs, and give her all my song;
Because she is so trusting and so weak,
I feel that I can suffer and be strong.

The while I try to keep the narrow way,
'Tis wide enough for both. And my white dove,
With untried wings, knows little love but this—
That "mother" is another name for "love."

❧

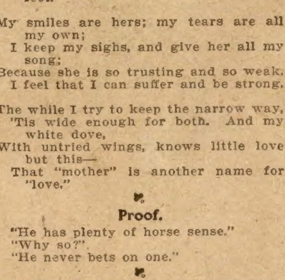
Proof.

"He has plenty of horse sense."

"Why so?"

"He never bets on one."

❧



Teacher—What does this glorious season mean to you, Willie?

Willie—Sulphur an' molasses.

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